Narratives of Historical Memory and Their Touristic Function:
The Case of Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*

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Abstract. This article discusses a documentary film, *Austerlitz* (2016), by the Ukrainian film director Sergei Loznitsa. The film shows massive flows of tourists visiting Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps, therefore, it is interpreted through the prism of dark tourism. The article argues that by functioning as a piece of virtual dark tourism, *Austerlitz* is constructed as a re-enactment of a collision with places of death. By refusing to moralize or condemn bored concentration camp visitors, Loznitsa enables the viewer to understand how radical experiences of mass destruction and death are being recorded in tourism practices in today's society. The French semiotician and philosopher Roland Barthes argues that death is most clearly perceived when it opens up as an act that has already taken place in the past, but at the same time will also take place in the future – *this has been* and *this will be*. The article concludes that exactly this is the effect of the documentary film *Austerlitz*. By showing crowds of visitors walking in the empty spaces of concentration camps, Loznitsa opens up a tragedy of mass destruction and death that has already taken place, but at the same time will also happen.

Keywords: dark tourism, concentration camp, documentary film, Sergei Loznitsa.

Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research which looks at the interpretation of the embedded war forms and their visual exposition in film, photography and video art.[1] In interpreting the ways in which the Holocaust is portrayed in cinema, there is a clear tendency to depict outright crimes, mass destruction, and victim suffering, and also the traces that all these have left in the daily life of today's

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society. One of the most controversial cases is when the threshold between everyday practices and the signs of war memory is blurred by the incorporation of war and other memorial sites into the tourist routes as attractions.

The combination of war crime memorials and tourist routes may seem contradictory, morally unacceptable, or even blasphemous. However, the fact that the sites of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities have become an integral part of tourist routes is obvious in modern society. In the description of the research John J. Lennon and Malcolm Foley carried out while visiting a number of memorial sites, they emphasized the proliferation and intensification of dark tourism, and the way it transformed the relationship to death: "in labelling some of these phenomena as 'Dark Tourism' we intend to signify a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are being handled by those who offer associated tourism 'products'" (Lennon and Foley 2000, 3). In describing the relationship between dark tourism and society, Lennon and Foley notice that contemporary society creates favourable conditions for the prosperity of dark tourism, as much as dark tourism creates and forms new circumstances for contemporary society. Therefore, dark tourism is not a peripheral side effect of contemporary society, but a complex phenomenon intertwined with existing memory modes and their visualization methods.

As they summarize the scale of dark tourism, Lennon and Foley call it a symptom of late modernism – an era that makes everything, including places and images of mass destruction, part of consumption. It is worth noting that the end of the Cold War provided an additional impetus to the flows of dark tourism. Therefore, dark tourism can be considered a symptomatic phenomenon not only of late modernity, but also, as Rudi Hartmann argues, of the post-Cold War era that opened tourist routes to the places where the Cold War demarcation lines were previously drawn (Hartmann 2014, 168).

Taking into account the scale of dark tourism and the place of this phenomenon in today's society, the tactics of the Ukrainian film director Sergei Loznitsa's documentary *Austerlitz* (2016) to depict the Holocaust by capturing tourist flows in Sachsenhausen and Dachau concentration camps becomes visible. While at first such a choice might seem marginal and peripheral, he brings us to the very epicentre of consumer and post-Cold War society. Therefore, when interpreting Loznitsa's film *Austerlitz*, the aims of this paper are twofold, first: to reveal the artistic features of this documentary about the Holocaust experience in today's society; and second: to look at what the exposed dark tourism experience shows about today's society and its relationship to death and mass destruction.

In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to look at the slightly broader context of dark tourism and cinematic representation. What is striking at first is the fact that cinema may not be a passive documentation form of the dark tourism phenomenon, but in itself it may adopt a form of virtual dark tourism.

Cinema as Virtual Dark Tourism

According to Kathryn N. McDaniel, virtual dark tourism not only reflects "real" dark tourism, but it is itself one of the variations of dark tourism (McDaniel 2018, 3). While virtual dark tourism functions as one of the forms of dark tourism, not only that it intertwines with memory practices, but it is also influenced by the commercialization laws of capitalist society.

Of course, as one of the varieties and forms of dark tourism, virtual dark tourism – literature, cinema, the Internet, computer games – has its advantages and disadvantages. Virtual dark tourism, as McDaniel summarizes different views, not only has no physical expression (it is possible to travel physically without moving from place to place), but it often lacks the virtual traveller's own intention (McDaniel 2018, 4). On the other hand, to compensate for the lack of direct presence, virtual dark tourism uses different aesthetic and artistic means which must ensure the persuasiveness of visual representations. In addition, virtual dark tourism undoubtedly democratizes the experiences of death by involving much larger masses in the flow of tourist trips than those of physical travellers (McDaniel 2018, 6).

In the age of virtual media, images of virtual dark tourism in many cases precede and form models through which the contents of physical dark tourism experience can be perceived. The fact that each person already has some virtual tourism experience before physically arriving in a dark tourism destination surely determines the dynamics of the dark tourism experience. It is obvious that someone who has had some radical experience (imprisonment, coercion, murder) through their own history or that of their loved ones, will experience a visit to the location of such experience as a radical re-enactment. At a closer look, however, it must be acknowledged that the re-enactment is also experienced by those who relied solely on images of virtual dark tourism prior to visiting the dark tourism locations. Therefore, the experience of re-enactment alongside travel is another key component that operates in the experience of dark tourism.

According to Joram ten Brink, documentary cinema has long used the technique of re-enactment as a way to relate to the past (Brink 2012, 180). He argues that

a distinction needs to be made between the cinema that simply shows the re-enactment of a historical event and the cinema that uses re-enactment as a creative method. The fundamental difference, according to Brink, lies in the relationship between the present and the past. While the depiction and re-enactment of historical events undoubtedly privileges the past, and can therefore be judged by how carefully history is recreated and depicted, re-enactment as a creative method recreates the past in order to question the present (Brink 2012, 181–182).

But what kind of past is associated with the present? What is the impact of the dark and traumatic past on the present? How does the present deal with the trauma of the dark past? Certainly, at least some of the answers to these questions can be found by specifying the conditions which define to whom and under what circumstances these questions are addressed, whose past and present are meant. John E. Tunbridge and Gregory J. Ashworth, who distinguished death camp tourism as a subtype of dark tourism, ask precisely – how dark, and for whom and what (Tunbridge and Ashworth 2017, 22). Like genocide tourism, death camp tourism is a highly polarizing activity that divides potential visitors into the camps of potential victims, potential perpetrators and witnesses. Alongside these main camps there is a mass of visitors who do not associate themselves with any of these groups, but can adopt their feelings and mindset. According to Ashworth and Tunbridge, visitors gravitating towards the camp of victims may adopt the feeling of "this could have been me," and, for a variety of reasons, visitors who feel the perpetrators' guilt maintain the feeling of "I could have done that" (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2017, 74).

Participants and viewers of cinema as a form of virtual dark tourism that exploits re-enactment as a creative method are not a unified mass either – they can gravitate towards different camps, which provide respective models for experiences of places of mass destruction, death and suffering. The re-enactment of experience realized in cinema may begin to unfold along an unpredictable trajectory that is the opposite of the expected. However, despite the attractiveness of the form – or perhaps precisely because of it – the re-enactment of dark tourism in cinema is likely to remain at the original point of the *status quo*. As Ashworth and Tunbridge point out, the inhabitants of the occupied territories of fascist Germany resisted, collaborated, or simply did nothing during World War II. Therefore, post-war Europe – as well as the West – adopted deliberate heritage amnesia as a form of social cohesion (Ashworth and Tunbridge 2017, 18). It goes without saying that such amnesia does not have to be absolute – it can go well with moderate forms of commemoration.

This is the starting position of Loznitsa's film *Austerlitz*: by using a slightly curious or even somewhat indifferent tourist as a creative tool, Loznitsa offers to embark on a death camp tourism trip. What the tourists portrayed in the film do physically, the viewers of the film experience virtually. Because, as mentioned above, the virtual tour inevitably functions as a re-enactment of the relationship with the sites of death and genocide, the spectators of *Austerlitz* recreate their relationship with the Holocaust, mass destruction, and death by repetition. What will the nature of this recreation be? It is the biggest intrigue in Loznitsa's film.

Touristic Experience as a Target and Device for Criticism

As Loznitsa mentions in his film trailer, he is amazed – or even astonished – by the situation of a tourist in the concentration camp. However, it would be wrong to assume that Loznitsa superimposes himself on a concentration camp tourist or unequivocally condemns them beforehand. On the contrary, Loznitsa takes the stance of a tourist, at least initially, and turns into one himself. "This is the place where people were exterminated; this is the place of suffering and grief. And now, I am here. A tourist. With all the typical curiosities of a tourist. Without any notion of what it was like to be a prisoner in the concentration camp having a number, every day waiting for death, clinging to life. I stand here and look at the machinery for the extermination of the human body. Traces of life, sometime ago, long ago, here and now. What am I doing here? What are all these people doing here, moving in groups from one object to another? The reason that induces thousands of people to spend their summer weekends in the former concentration camp is one of the mysteries of these memorial sites. One can refer to the good will and the desire to sense compassion and mercy that Aristotle associated with tragedy. But this explanation doesn't solve the mystery?" (Loznitsa 2016.)

As it can be seen, Loznitsa identifies himself with the tourist experience, poses a whole range of questions and even provides the primary suggestion as to what answer to these questions should not be satisfying – it is an attempt to describe and legitimize the experience of the tourist in terms of Aristotelian components of tragedy. In *Poetics,* Aristotle states that the tragedy arouses pity and fear in such a way as to culminate in catharsis. The possibility of catharsis in particular redeems the cruelties the perceiver has to go through. Loznitsa deprives the viewers of one of the most evident keys for the interpretation of the film by stating that the Aristotelian paradigm of catharsis falls short in describing the

experience of the memorial site visitors. Once he does that, the director invites the viewers to look for answers together with him while observing the trajectories of the concentration camp memorial site visitors instead of just using one theory that is supposed to explain everything.

Nevertheless, it is certainly not easy to say what the visitors of concentration camps think while being filmed. In the film *Austerlitz*, they are walking around individually or in groups and transforming the process of memorial site exploration into a museum experience. The wave of interest, as usual in the mode of sightseeing, exchanges with the wave of tiredness and boredom. Individual visitors struggle to resist it. Organized tour groups, however, are guided by professionals who, in addition to informing the visitors, ensure that the visitors keep sufficient level of interest, focus and attention.

At the premiere of *Austerlitz* in Vilnius, Loznitsa admitted that the stories of the tour guides were recorded separately and of course with special preparation, but not on site in the concentration camps. It is possible that the tour guides, being aware of the use of their narratives in the film, have consciously emphasized the breathtaking components of their stories. It leads to paradoxical and even macabre results – the tour guides in *Austerlitz* begin a sort of competition as to who would be the most frightening, imaginative and thus entertaining in conveying the suffering of tortured and murdered victims. One of the most important imperatives of tourism industry is to create "unforgettable and breathtaking" impressions. However, while racing for the most shocking account of already horrible atrocities, the guides reach a dangerous threshold. The process of building something "unforgettable" in this case results in the opposite consequences – the tour guide narratives are being formatted as if they were media products.

As much as the tour guide narratives are constructed like media products, they also imply a corresponding relationship to history. In her work *Scenes from Postmodern Life*, Beatriz Sarlo states that a specific form of memory prevails in the flourishing television culture: "some image fragments manage to establish themselves in our consciousness with the weight of iconicity, and are recognized, remembered, and cited, while such other fragments are passed by and can be repeated infinitely without boring anybody because, in fact, nobody sees them. These latter images are padding, constituting a gelatinous tide in which other images float and sink, and from which those that have established themselves as recognizable icons can emerge" (Sarlo 2001, 52). According to Sarlo, memorable icons interact with the mass of non-memorable images as if with "a contrasting medium." Therefore, as long as the mass of non-memorable images highlights the

memorable icons enough, the appropriate ratio between what is passing by and is not remembered, and what stays in memory and is remembered exists. As soon as the contrast is violated and destabilized, a new space for zapping – attention and channel switching – occurs. Sarlo foresees that the viewer would switch attention or channel when there is a lack of memorable iconic images to keep the sufficient attention (Sarlo 2001, 53). However, it is possible to see how a similar result – the switch of attention – can be caused by an opposite tendency. When everything is highlighted as iconic and meaningful, nothing forgettable remains, i.e. there is no more "contrasting medium." In that case iconic images overlap and create friction. The sequence of unforgettable images surpasses the viewer's capability to perceive it. This is why the sequence of equally unforgettable or equivalent images turns against itself and allows the zones of "relaxation" or "wandering" within it.

The most symptomatic illustration of this paradox and one of the most controversial moments in the film *Austerlitz* is when the visitors of memorial sites forget themselves where there seemingly is no space for forgetting – hence the ongoing posing for photographs and selfies. [Fig. 2.] The process of photography is said to be time-breaking and "eternalizing," and for a reason. However, photographs and selfies on the site of mass extermination of people do not bear any witness, they rather ignore that fact. The visitors create a kind of "contrasting medium" for themselves, which would allow the shift from a binding to a non-binding and relaxing mode. In this case the attention of a visitor becomes a transmitting element, which helps the transformation from the iconic to the insignificant to happen.

Of course, Loznitsa is not the first artist to notice the paradox that occurs when the process of photography (or filming) itself pushes aside what is being photographed (or being filmed). John J. Lennon and Dorothee Weber, who have studied the commercialization of the town of Dachau and its concentration camp, note that taking pictures in a concentration camp in literature and cinema is often portrayed as one of the most inappropriate behaviours. At first, Lennon and Weber draw attention to *The History Boys*, a play by British playwright Alan Bennet, in which photographing each other eating sandwiches, holding hands and smiling at each other are included in the list of inappropriate behaviour through the perspective of one of the characters (Lennon and Weber 2017, 39). However, no matter how obvious the parallels between Bennett, or other similar authors, and Loznitsa may seem, it is impossible not to notice the obvious difference between them. Taking pictures in a concentration camp environment can be directly or

indirectly described as an extraneous activity that has nothing to do with this environment. Loznitsa, on the other hand, without any moralizing burden, shows that for a tourist figure, such self-capturing against the background of places of death is an essential and inevitable procedure. From here arises the paradox of every visitor who uses places of death as a sequence of sights – by capturing themselves against the backdrop of "significant" places of death, these visitors desensitize and downplay such places. The process of self-photography or self-filming begins to erase what is being photographed or filmed.

Susan Sontag has described travel photography and emphasized that taking photographs not only certifies the experience, but also refuses it, as it converts the experience into an image, a souvenir (Sontag 2008, 6). How this procedure of erasing experience is taking place in the age of digital photography has been well illustrated by Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness in their text *Phenomenology for the Selfie* that focuses on selfie technique. Bollmer and Guinness focus on the technical aspect of selfies – when a person makes a selfie, the photographer focuses not on the environment but on his or her image on the phone in which the selfie is usually taken (Bollmer and Guinness 2017, 164–165). Although the end result of a selfie is different – a person against the backdrop of a particular environment –, the experience of taking a selfie itself is focused on forgetting the immediate environment and reducing the person's relationship with the environment. As Bollmer and Guinness observe, such an effect of environmental erasure is paradoxically noticeable even when a selfie is taken not for the sake of amusement but to neutralize a terrifying environment. By photographing themselves against a background of a terrifying environment and focusing on their image on the phone, a person anaesthetizes the environment and thus separates themselves from that environment (Bollmer and Guinness 2017, 172–173).

This attitude of the tourists eventually inflicts a doubt about the fact that the concentration camp visitors, the documentary filmmaker and the viewers of this film should definitely have the same experience visiting the concentration camps. It is clear that not all of the memorial site visitors have the lack of attention and focus, not all of them and their attention is formed by the logic of iconic and insignificant events, and not everyone becomes thoughtful only when, according to Watkins, the reflection is triggered by specially prepared "oases" for silence and thinking.

The figure of a concentration camp memorial site visitor is multifaceted and diversified. It splits into different, often incompatible identities, attitudes and views. This diversification becomes even more evident when the spectators stop

merely observing the migrating flows of concentration camp site visitors and start asking themselves about the relationship between these memorial site visitor flows and the title – *Austerlitz* – given to the film by its director.

Auschwitz and Austerlitz: The Paradoxes of the Mistake

Although it is macabre, it is very likely that some viewers initially do not even notice that the film about concentration camp memorial sites, without a particular reason, is named *Austerlitz* and not Auschwitz. Both names sound similar, but refer to completely different memorial sites. Austerlitz is a place primarily known for the battle of December 5, 1805, when the French army led by Emperor Napoleon defeated the much greater forces of Russia and Austria. Whereas Auschwitz is the place where the Nazis ran the largest concentration and mass extermination camp in the twentieth century during World War II. From a linear historical perspective, nothing in common is possible between Austerlitz and Auschwitz. The probability of mixing them up and mistaking one for the other can be explained only in one way – the focus here is on the memory of a contemporary individual who often manipulates various historical facts freely, and not on the linear sequence of historical facts.

The level on which the viewer becomes capable of mistaking Auschwitz for Austerlitz essentially corresponds to the level where the curious, but also distracted tourist thrives. It is difficult to get rid of the impression that the confusion between Auschwitz and Austerlitz is the intention of the film director, who foresees the initial lack of focus not only in the tourist he portrays, but also in the figure of the spectator. By naming the film *Austerlitz*, Loznitsa confuses the viewer and provides them with a clear hint which leads beyond the topos of tourist experience. *Austerlitz* is not a direct reference to a physical place, but to a novel of the same name written by the German writer Winfried Georg Sebald.

After reading the novel it becomes clear that the protagonist, architectural historian Jacques Austerlitz, dives little by little into the depth of his own memory. Brought to Wales before World War II as small child from Czechoslovakia which was threatened at that time by Nazi Germany, he loses contact with his parents. Many years later, after gaining the classical education and becoming an architectural historian, Austerlitz meets a friend of his parents, who helps him to recollect the scraps of memories – first of all, Czech and French idioms that he once knew. The friend tells Austerlitz that his mother was brought to Theresienstadt concentration camp. While watching the Nazi propaganda

documentary, which shows peacefully working Jewish people in Theresienstadt camp, Austerlitz thinks that he has seen his mother. Although the mistake becomes evident shortly, the range of vision of the architectural historian has already embraced the field of personal family history.

It is pretty clear where this relationship between the film and Sebald's famous work leads to. As Loznitsa says in the aforementioned quotation, he identifies his first experience with the experience of a tourist, and emphasizes that he does not know what it means to be a prisoner in a concentration camp, have a prisoner number, and live in the anticipation of death every day. More than seventy years have passed since the Second World War and the Holocaust tragedy, but almost all of the visitors in Sachsenhausen, Dachau, Auschwitz and other memorials share the same experience the film director described. Nevertheless, there are plenty of other ways to individualize the form of relationship to the tragedy of Holocaust, even in the absence of the direct experience. Sebald's *Austerlitz* represents an outstanding example of such individualization – the search for traces of the protagonist's mother, who was imprisoned and perished in the concentration camp. There are many other examples, alongside this particular one, which prevent the mode of touristic consumption of memorial sites. After all, even artworks such as Sebald's *Austerlitz* may serve as a suspending factor for the touristic mode.

It is this suspension of the touristic mode of consumption of places of death and the individualization of experiences that could pave the way for a radical transformation of attitudes towards places of death, which some authors equate to Damascene conversion (Tunbridge and Ashworth 2017, 13). Just like Saul converted to his own opposite and became Paul on the way to Damascus, so can visiting places of death – in some cases – lead to a radical change in the primary intention with which one enters such places, to a conversion.

Loznitsa starts at the level where the viewer is still able to mistake Austerlitz for Auschwitz, then moves to the level where Sachsenhausen, Dachau, or Auschwitz acquire their own, unique contours. However, the memory that breaks, forgets, operates in a long distance and returns, increases sensibility not only to something that was experienced a long time ago and forgotten, but also to that which is not yet experienced and invisible at large. The architectural historian, in one of the defining moments in Sebald's *Austerlitz*, admits that the dead are more alive than the people living in concentration camps. In Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*, the viewers observe the concentration camp memorial site visitors, but imagining the contours of killed victims is inevitable in the intervals between the filmed visitors.

Genocide: Has Already Happened and Is Yet to Happen

The people who are no longer alive can become visible in the photographic or cinematographic image. A notable photograph in this respect was taken at the beginning of the twentieth century and was included in Daniel Lenchner's found-photograph collection.[2] It depicts graduate students at one of the Lakota schools in North Dakota. There is nothing extreme about the photo at first sight – a couple of rows of students and teachers. There are thousands of pictures like this around the world. All of them belong to the same genre and the seemingly minor differences between them are defined by the region, time and context of local traditions. However, according to Lenchner, the most macabre highlight of this photograph lies not in what is depicted, but in what is absent in the image. After taking a closer look at the student rows, it becomes evident that there is not a single indigenous American from the previously flourishing community which was based in the area. As Lenchner notes, "it looks like a class portrait, but you could also say that this is a picture of genocide" (Lenchner and Morin 2014).

Thousands of similar photographs emerged after the war in the territories previously controlled by the Nazi regime. Like in the photograph of the Lakota school, not only what is present is important; it is also important what is absent from the image – thousands of Jewish young people who did not survive to see their graduation. The photographs made in the period of peace, years before the war, show the changing, maturing faces of students. The genocide during the war destroys thousands of people. However, while looking at the students in the after-war photographs, it becomes clear that the murdered students are not erased, because it is impossible to erase the intense absence of the murdered people from the image.

One of the most important privileges of visual media is to bear witness of what does not exist anymore. Roland Barthes established two famous factors, *studium* and *punctum* of a photographic image, and states that visual media such as photography has a "collective" *punctum* intrinsic to the whole realm of photography and that is – death. The specific time framework is essential in the phenomenon of death as the *punctum*. Barthes uses the photograph of a prisoner sentenced to death taken in 1865 to argue that the overlap of past and present is one of the main characteristics of the *punctum*: "the photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the

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2   See: *https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/5gkyk3/nazi-era-snapshots-and-the-banality-of-evil.* Last accessed 28. 01. 2022.

same time: *This will be* and *this has been*. I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (*aorist*), the photograph tells me death in the future" (Barthes 2000, 96, italics in the original).

Barthes connects the photograph of the sentenced prisoner to the photograph of his mother as a small girl, which essentially inspired him to think of photography and the phenomenon of its relation to death. When looking at the photograph of the small girl, the overlap of future and past time – she will die and she is dead – seems even sharper and even more painful. It is symptomatic that Barthes did not include the photograph of his mother, which inspired the book, into the book, leaving it in the invisible but actively implied space.

It is this invisible but actively implied zone that is, after all, the most intense attention capturing plane of Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*, the Barthesean *punctum*. Like in the photograph discussed by Lenchner where the Lakota school graduates stand in rows, and which at first sight does not represent anything horrible, the traffic of people in Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* does not seem exceptional and looks similar to the traffic of visitors in other museums. Moreover, the visitors taking photographs at the entrance gate of the concentration camp bring to mind the visitors who take photographs at the entrance of a recreational zone or an entertainment park. [Fig. 1.] Only the inscription on the gate Arbeit Macht Frei [in English, Work Sets You Free] turns these images upside down and reveals that their meaning is defined by something that is not present in the shots of these sauntering streams of visitors. It is defined by thousands of victims killed in the premises of this concentration camp. These victims and the bodies of killed people that are invisible on the screen transform the loitering visitor streams with photo cameras into something exceptional and special. Essentially the killed people are the condition for the visitors – if there were no victims, there would be no memorial with its distracted or attentive visitors. This is why, like in Lenchner's case when the simple photograph of the graduate students represents the sign of genocide, also in this case hundreds and thousands of visitors, distracted or attentive does not matter, manifest the traces of genocide of unthinkable scope. In her work, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch notes that photographic images stand out in an effort to reanimate the lost or brutally destroyed past, but they also represent the consciousness of impossibility to bring it back (Hirsch 2012, 36–37). It is also impossible to recover the past because, paradoxically, the lost past has not completely passed, and this is what the slow, almost static, animated photograph-like images of the visitors of the Austerlitz concentration camp refer to. The visitor streams affirm – the mass

extermination of people has already happened and the references to the lives of future victims who were still alive at that time suggest that mass extermination of people is yet to happen. Like in the aforementioned case in Barthes, the fusion of the past and the future, when unthinkable tragedy which happened in the past is still awaiting in the future, strikes us with its inevitability and irrevocability.

Once this directly invisible space, which organizes and defines the meaning of the film *Austerlitz* is exposed, there is a kind of a return to the beginning – to the question what could be the driving factor of both the memorial site visitors and the film that captures them. If the motivation of visitors cannot be explained by the Aristotelian wish to experience pity and compassion, as Loznitsa states, then it would be impossible to draw the conclusion that the aim of the film *Austerlitz* is the enlightening and purifying Aristotelian catharsis.

Final Remarks

The unthinkable tragedy of the genocide should serve as a lesson that is impossible not to learn. Nonetheless, selfies taken in the locations of the gas chambers witness such memorial site visitors behaving as if nothing special has ever happened in that location. As mentioned above, Loznitsa does not attack the touristic practices in the memorial sites of mass extermination but observes them through a neutral gaze without an intention to moralize. The visitors, experiencing mass extermination sites in touristic mode, are obviously not monsters of any kind, but their "banal" boredom in the concentration camp premises macabrely connects with the mass extermination of people, which took place there some time ago and was hidden under the idea of the "banal" duty.

Perhaps this is the darkest result of *Austerlitz*: if even evil cannot teach anything, that leaves no hope. Nevertheless, alongside the action on the screen there is also the figure of the spectator. While looking at the visitors who look at the mass extermination sites, the viewer enters an area of the highest danger. There is a probability that the viewer of Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* will get bored, in the way some of the concentration camp visitors portrayed in the film do. The boredom of the spectator in this case would testify a larger atrophy and ignorance than that of the visitor, as while observing the visitors the spectator is not able not to reflect. In her work *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology*, Malin Wahlberg points out that documentaries – including Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* – are often characterized by isochronal representations in which real time coincides with film time. Such isochronal representations are often perceived as specific

meta-elements of cinema, because the extended shot and static camera make the viewer feel their own gaze (Wahlberg 2008, 21). Placed into a real-time situation, where static long shots are slowly replaced by other shots of visitors walking around the concentration camp, the spectators of *Austerlitz* are forced to feel their gaze and their potentially arising boredom.

It is this dangerous zone which witnesses the crossroad between ignorance and decline, on the one hand, and attentiveness and reflection, on the other, that is the essential gift of the film *Austerlitz*. It is much more precious than the gift of promised and convenient catharsis. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the phenomena of virtual tourism are superior to the phenomena of physical tourism. It just means that by giving the viewer the opportunity to observe people attending concentration camps, *Austerlitz* also provides an opportunity to look at the conditions in which today an individual perceives confrontation with death beyond imagination.

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