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► **To cite this version:**

Laurent Jullier, Jean-Marc Leveratto. The Story of a Myth: The "Tracking Shot in Kapò" or the Making of French Film Ideology. *Mise au Point*, 2016, 8, 10.4000/map.2069 . hal-03198994

**HAL Id: hal-03198994**

**<https://hal.univ-lorraine.fr/hal-03198994>**

Submitted on 15 Apr 2021

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*L'Histoire d'un mythe : le « travelling de Kapo » ou la formation de l'idéologie française du film d'auteur*

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/map/2069>

DOI: 10.4000/map.2069

ISSN: 2261-9623

**Publisher**

Association française des enseignants et chercheurs en cinéma et audiovisuel

Brought to you by Université de Lorraine



**Electronic reference**

Laurent Jullier et Jean-Marc Leveratto, "The Story of a Myth : The "Tracking Shot in *Kapo*" or the Making of French Film Ideology", *Mise au point* [Online], 8 | 2016, Online since 01 April 2016, connection on 15 April 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/map/2069> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/map.2069>

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This text was automatically generated on 15 April 2021.



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# The Story of a Myth : The “Tracking Shot in Kapò” or the Making of French Film Ideology

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- 1 In France, mention of the “Tracking Shot in Kapò” – now TSK – does not necessarily imply that one refers to an actual shot taken from Gillo Pontecorvo’s Italian film *Kapò* (1961); rather, it has come to refer to a myth (in the practical sense given to the term by Roland Barthes). Such myth is designed to forge a moral compass regarding film consumption in general. This compass highlights what is always wrong and should be avoided in matters of filmmaking, i.e., which technical choice should be prohibited when making a film – and, as a consequence, which assessment a spectator should produce of a work obviously made in the absence of such a compass. The myth is nonetheless rooted in a particular shot from *Kapò*, yet this shot is used as a metonymy to express the mutual incompatibility between art cinema and the entertainment film. More than half a century of these successive readings of what now appears to be seen as Pontecorvo’s infamous artistic gesture, have actually cemented into a handy ready-to-use theoretical tool in the French public sphere, including media, education and government discourses concerning the cinema. It has become an artistic *common place*<sup>1</sup> frequently used by experts to promote highbrow cinephilia<sup>2</sup> and to legitimize the necessity of a “popular education” to the art of film.
- 2 In the first four sections of this essay we describe the somehow feeble first public steps of the TSK, and the successive readings that have brought it fame and, later, decline. In the fifth section we try to show what epistemological biases ought, arguably, to prevent the TSK from becoming a bona fide academic theory. Finally, the concluding section reminds us of how *situation* and *frame* (quoting from Erving Goffman’s work) play a key role in theoretical quarrels about the *rightness* of artistic gestures<sup>3</sup>.

## 1. TSK begins

- 3 In the beginning, TSK is not (yet) TSK. In *Cahiers du cinéma* n°120, Jacques Rivette merely reviewed and criticized *Kapò*. He clearly didn’t like the film at all, and picked up one shot – the tracking shot – to serve as a synecdoche of what he believed was its main failure. The quote, which has since gained the status of a *meme* in France and has been duplicated *ad nauseam* since 1962, must unfortunately be reminded here once more if only for the sake of the argument:

Look however in *Kapò*, the shot where Riva commits suicide by throwing herself on electric barbed wire: the man who decides at this moment to make a forward tracking shot to reframe the dead body – carefully positioning the raised hand in the corner of the final framing – this man is worthy of the most profound contempt<sup>4</sup>

- 4 If one puts aside its rhetoric, a verbal violence that was quite common at the time among Parisian film critics<sup>5</sup>, this first move, in June 1962, does not simply appear out of nowhere. Indeed, a few years earlier – in March 1959 –, Luc Moullet had already asserted that “morality relies on tracking shots”<sup>6</sup>, a claim made in reference to the work of Samuel Fuller who, as it turns out noted somewhat bitterly some fifty years later, that it “[did] more for [his] fame than the whole bunch of [his] movies”<sup>7</sup>. Equally famous, moreover, is the reversal of this statement by Jean-Luc Godard one month later in the same journal, on the occasion of a debate on Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour*, with tracking shots now used to illustrate a dubious morality – this time the context is concentrationary cinema, since the subject is now *Nuit et brouillard*. If the argument (with and without its reversal) is compatible with the future TSK, Godard adds something that will not at all be taken into account by Rivette and Daney, namely the specificity of the subject matter:

If a film about concentration camps or torture is signed by Couzinet<sup>8</sup> or by Visconti, I think it is almost the same thing for me... The problem that arises when showing horrible scenes is that the director’s intention automatically goes beyond our comprehension, and we are shocked by these images, almost in the same way that we are shocked by pornographic images<sup>9</sup>

- 5 We shall return later to this point, which also probably explains why *Le Monde*’s film critic felt ill at ease when *Kapò* was released in Paris in May 1961: he enjoyed the cinematic form of the movie (no TSK syndrome here), but was reluctant to approve what he called the “principle” of *Kapò*, i.e., the telling of a story (even more so a love story) which takes place in a concentration camp:

There’s something sacred in the horror we feel in thinking about the camps, he writes. And to mix this horror with a quixotic script – as believable, trustworthy and moving as this script is – seems to me to be a lack of good taste, or at least an unnecessary boldness<sup>10</sup>

- 6 However, this is not quite the birth of TSK and the argument will lie dormant for a while. No doubt Rivette’s anathema is already well known among the successive teams of *Cahiers* writers, but the public sphere, the media and educators were still ignorant of the powerful resource it holds. In Rivette’s defence and in so far as the conclusion of his short paper makes clear, it must be remembered that the aim for him was less to demolish *Kapò* than to offer a self-apology for the kind of criticism he and his partners François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were defending in the pages of *Cahiers*, i.e., peer-only criticism. According to Rivette, only qualified professionals “make History”, therefore nobody understands Antonioni better than Resnais, Renoir better than Truffaut, Rossellini better

than Godard, nor Visconti better than Demy. “And as Cézanne, against the will of all columnists and newspapermen, was gradually imposed by painters themselves, film directors are now imposing Murnau or Mizoguchi in the History of cinema”<sup>11</sup>. In short, Rivette, who had been assisting Jacques Becker on *Ali Baba* and Jean Renoir on *French-Cancan*, and had already directed, by 1962, *Le Coup du Berger* (a short film produced by Pierre Braunberger) and *Paris nous appartient* (co-produced by François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol), clearly saw his role at *Cahiers* as that of a “qualified professional” - moreover, one concerned with art rather than activism and for whom Pontecorvo’s naïve political commitment immediately disqualified both the filmmaker and his film<sup>12</sup>.

- 7 The true awakening of TSK comes later, under the pen of Serge Daney. In 1990, Daney begins an autobiographical book, whose chapters will be published separately in the quarterly journal he founded in 1991 with Jean-Claude Biette, *Trafic*. This is it, then: the original TSK, published only a few weeks before Daney’s death, in May 1992<sup>13</sup>. In this piece, Daney approves of Rivette, corroborating that Pontecorvo’s camera movement “was the one movement not to make”. For him, “the ‘artistic’ pornography of *Kapò*” comes from the fact that the tracking shot “wants to be beautiful [but] isn’t” - or to put it more clearly, *is beautiful but is not right*. And it’s not just because it belongs to the arsenal of classical Hollywood cinema, i.e., to a style of framing, cutting and scoring which seeks to enrol the audience’s sympathies by putting them in the shoes of the main character. For nobody wants to be in a concentration camp. The “extra pretty” tracking shot, writes Daney, “was putting us - he the filmmaker and I the spectator - in a place where we did not belong, where I could not nor did not want to be”. It’s a shame “to be seen as someone who has to be aesthetically seduced”, when the story takes place in a concentration camp. Notice, however, that from Rivette to Daney, a significant shift in perspective had taken place: we move from the point of view of the “professional” who cares about the misuse of the camera to that of a consumer/spectator eager to protect his self-respect.
- 8 The key to the future fame of TSK consists then in the transformation of a *token* (one unacceptable camera movement) into a *type* (all the unbearable misfitting combinations between an object event and its representation or its artistic framing); the transformation of a visual object into a tool of measurement for the moral dignity of the consumer, and consequently for the measurement of their cinematic expertise. This expertise consists not only in an ability to recognize the artistic quality of whatever films are released on the local market, but in an *active promotion* of a particular art of film directing, rejecting all kinds of sensational effects. “Throughout the years, writes Daney, ‘the tracking shot in *Kapò*’ would become my portable dogma, the axiom that could not be discussed, the breaking point of any debate.” By making the artistic quality of the film a matter of both faith (“dogma”) and scientific conviction (« axiom ») regarding the illegitimacy of certain types of film directing, Daney’s behavior is thus typical of modern cinephilia as a style of film consumption —, one mocked by Pierre Bourdieu in *La Distinction* when he characterizes « movie-buffs [as people] who know everything there is to know about films they have not seen »<sup>14</sup>. Consequently, the sharing of the same artistic faith in a certain kind of film directing allows the consumer to trust everyone who promotes the same faith, and to take their word for it.
- 9 It’s a fact that Daney never saw *Kapò*. Yet far from apologizing, he turned this absent experience into an advantage, one given to him and to other *Cahiers* readers by Rivette: to be exempted from suffering through a terrible film. Thus, Rivette’s technical diktat gets translated into an aesthetic “whistleblowing”, his professional eye helping any filmgoer

eager to control the artistic quality of their consumption and not to waste their time viewing an awful film. This interpretation of the situation allows Daney to justify his right and his capacity to assert the quality of a film he never saw: “I haven’t seen *Kapò* and at the same time I have seen it. I have seen it because someone has shown it to me – with words”. In so doing, Daney underlines the efficiency of the *Kunstliteratur* (or “artistic literature”) as a means of artistic transmission and recalls the role played by his admiration of the literary skills of Rivette in the birth of his own professional vocation — one must recall that Daney “acquired [his] first conviction as a future movie critic” after reading Rivette’s piece on *Kapò* at the age of seventeen.

- 10 Therefore Daney’s paper is at the same time a tribute to the author of a memorable review of *Kapò* and an artistic (and strongly autobiographical) testament in favor of a certain kind of film criticism. In addition to addressing some mysterious *happy few* (Sylvie P., Jean-Louis S.), the article is peppered with melancholia: Daney knows he’s going to die soon and, as a former Editor-in-Chief of *Cahiers du cinéma* romantically, but incautiously, wrote: “melancholy urged him to match his own death with the death of cinema”<sup>15</sup>. Thus Daney can conclude that the world he lived in was no longer livable because it had become a world where “tracking shots are no longer a moral issue and [where] the cinema is too weak to entertain such a question”.

## 2. The rise to power of TSK

- 11 Next act of the TSK play: the metamorphosis of a personal “portable dogma” into a common theory<sup>16</sup>. Daney himself posthumously initiated the action, resuming TSK in his most famous interview<sup>17</sup>, in which he shows how useful the dogma is when transposed on various cultural products. He notably uses it to dismiss a music video far better known in France than Pontecorvo’s obscure film: *We Are the World*, where starving African children replace the Italian filmmaker’s skinny war deportees<sup>18</sup>. The principle having been made yet easier to grasp in this way, an always-increasing number of essayists and intellectuals have quoted or recycled it. And one has to admit that this is less a (digital) duplication process than an (analogical) copying process, which includes estimations and misprints.
- 12 The French release of *Schindler’s List*, in March 1994, provided the TSK with a first gain of popularity, not to mention that the recent death of Daney had made any criticism of his ideas seem either misplaced or even disrespectful. Even if Daney never stopped repeating that this dogma of his was a *personal* one, it quickly became a very public one. Among French critics, Spielberg now appeared as somebody who made abject things pretty, first because he told a story with a happy ending, then because he didn’t hesitate to process the image itself, putting it in black-and-white and colorizing in red the little girl who leads Oskar Schindler to his moral awakening<sup>19</sup>. In spite of an influent paper by Michel Chion who claimed that an excessive attention to details “kills film criticism”<sup>20</sup>, the little girl in red came to occupy the same function as *Kapò*’s tracking shot on Therese. In *Le Monde*, *Shoah*’s director Claude Lanzmann called up Rivette’s *De l’abjection*, though — not surprisingly if we recall the reluctance of *Le Monde*’s film critic towards the subject of *Kapò* — he took a far more radical moral position whereby one simply *can’t represent* events like the Shoah<sup>21</sup>. The ethical or religious rejection of the screening of a certain type of subject matter — just like nowadays the Muslim rejection of any portraiture of Muhammad — delineate a very different issue from that of the professional assessment of a technical misconduct in matters of filmmaking. French historian François Garçon, who

will later become famous in France for his reading of *Darwin's Nightmare* (another polemic about image and truth), offers an example of the latter perspective. Although he didn't mention the TSK, he used a similar argument to Daney's in his disparaging comments on *Schindler's List*, maintaining that the female inmates waiting for the shower in the camp "are mostly chubby", and that this is a sign of good health which is not consistent with the historical truth<sup>22</sup>.

- 13 However, the effect of the "Shoah Industry", i.e., the political debates focusing on the issue of the respect of the victims generated by the professionalization of the expertise regarding this historical event, is not to be confused with the TSK issue, even though filmmakers are equally concerned by it. A few years later, in 1998, Lanzmann went as far as declaring that he would destroy a film made in the camps (the kind of precious print nobody has ever found) should he ever discover one in some archive. Our duty, he claimed, should be to spare any truth about the holocaust from depending on an image, since images are too weak – they can be discussed, questioned, falsified, even if one is convinced that what they are screening is an authentic print. Jean-Luc Godard disagreed, and the French media accentuated the quarrel between the two filmmakers. According to Godard such hidden archive films do exist<sup>23</sup>, and Lanzmann merely repeats the role of "Moses" coming down from Sinai with the iconoclastic idea of prohibiting any representation of the sacred<sup>24</sup>. However, Godard's position quickly appears very risky, since the argument, once taken *ex negativo*, matches that of French negationist Robert Faurisson: the fact that nobody has never found these archive films is evidence that the gas chambers never existed<sup>25</sup>. We are far from the aesthetical debate over the artistic quality of films and of the use of TSK as a issue of concern for movie-buffs.
- 14 In 1998 the French release of Roberto Benigni's *La vita è bella* offered a new occasion to discuss the question of film spectator's self-respect. In *Le Monde*, Jean-Michel Frodon called-up the TSK to dismiss the movie, yet shifting the very idea of fascism into the question of interpreting and appreciating films: the real fascists here are the spectators who refuse to enter the TSK-like debate roused up by *La vita è bella* on the pretext that they profoundly loved the movie and were moved by its story<sup>26</sup>. The "symbolical violence" of this discourse epitomizes the institutionalization of what we call 'modern French cinephilia', as a result of the promotion, through highschool and university, of a film culture based on the refusal of the entertainment film. Time has come for Alain Resnais, logically, to recall the artistic stake pointed out by Rivette. "I can pretty well see when the camera moves on Emmanuelle Riva's hand, says Resnais. One cannot make *mise en scène* of such images"<sup>27</sup>.
- 15 Deciding which signification should be assigned to any screen representation of the Shoah has now become a major issue, far more important than that of the professional misconduct of Pontecorvo, who "didn't ask himself the question of knowing whether his tracking shot was moral or not"<sup>28</sup>. The Paris exhibition « *Mémoire des camps, photographies des camps de concentration et d'extermination nazis (1933- 1999)* », starting on January 2001, triggered a new French polemic about visual tracks of the horror. Georges Didi-Huberman, in the exhibit's catalog, calls for 'epistemological precautions' to be taken in the presence of four photographs secretly taken in August 1944 inside Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Sonderkommando, instead of simply claiming these four images constitute real evidence. "To make these images readable means to reveal their own construction", he writes<sup>29</sup>. But such an attitude makes him liable to revisionism<sup>30</sup>. French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy confirms: "concerning the Shoah, there are voyeuristic

images and images like gazes”<sup>31</sup>. But what these positions have in common is the vanishing of the spectator’s agency : they always put all the moral weight on the image alone, like the TSK does.

- 16 From this moment onward, the status of artistic commonplace reached by the TSK in France was such that it continuously generated new voices aiming to enhance its *aesthetical* meaning rather than its *professional* one, or, if you will, its function as sign of the artistic reality of a film for the filmgoer. Thus, a few years later, French sociologist Nathalie Heinich could call on the same terms of argument to explain that she had enjoyed *La vita è bella* by virtue of its absence of realism, since camp inmates in the film were “neither skinny nor shaved”<sup>32</sup>. Here, the very same argument used by S. Daney (and F. Garçon) to criticize *Kapò* as a device to enhance the identification of the onlooker to the character becomes a positive one: thank God, no human skeletons were casted for the film... According to this point of view, the art film escapes the mimetic, “lookalike trap” (according to which ultimate realism consists in re-doing things for real), by showing its viewers that it is an artistic product, a fiction, therefore that it is an artefact equivalent to non-mechanical representations such as paintings or comic books (think, for example, of Art Spiegelman’s *Mauss*).
- 17 With the same purpose in mind, as early as 1998, Nathalie Nezić was led to warn scholars and critics of the danger of letting the “analogical virality of the text” deteriorate the TSK, i.e., the loss of accuracy it endures every time somebody uses it regardless of its initial context and sums it up without any caution<sup>33</sup>. Yet, the popularization of the formula through the French media by famous talk show hosts — especially those who graduated from universities where they underwent a film studies education —, was so strong that by the end of the nineties the TSK was now commonly used as a synonym for the aesthetization of horror. Thus, French writer Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, from the Académie Française, could use the TSK in a general paper in which he bemoaned the excessive importance of “photogeny” in the French public sphere, whereby one has to “look photogenic” in order to gain success as a politician or as a philosopher<sup>34</sup>.

### 3. The TSK goes performative

- 18 In 2002, time came for the TSK to become a cornerstone of French state politics in matters of film censorship. The Kriegel Report, whose title is “Violence on the TV screen”<sup>35</sup>, was solemnly given to the Minister of Culture, Mr. Aillagon, on November 14<sup>th</sup>, and its conclusions lead to the March 2004 reform of the classification system of films, which was more severe than the previous one, especially concerning the adult-rated films. Among dozens of surprising mistakes and disputable assertions<sup>36</sup>, the Report uses the TSK in a rather lazy fashion. None of its 36 signatories obviously saw *Kapò* but they assure their readers that “Pontecorvos’s camera endlessly lingers on the face of a woman who slowly dies after she tried to escape from a concentration camp”. The truth is that Therese isn’t trying to escape (she is committing suicide), and the camera does not linger on her, since her death, before the infamous tracking shot begins, lasts fewer than 3 seconds (61 frames to be exact)... The Auclair Report<sup>37</sup>, a few years later, was a little more serious, but not too much. Solemnly presented, one more time, to the 2008 Minister of Culture Ms. Albanel, it summed up the TSK in a nonchalant way before supporting its legitimacy: “Jacques Rivette says about a shameful shot in a film called *Kapò* that tracking shots are a



moral matter”. It’s Godard — not Rivette! — who actually said so, but once again who cares, since the TSK lives with its “analogical virality” (Nezick).

- 19 2004 is the moment of internationalization for TSK, the well-known Australian online film journal *Senses of Cinema* publishing an English translation of Daney’s paper. The editors, while taking no issue with the ethical rightness of the paper, frame it historically:

Beyond the temptation to overplay the importance of this article in Daney’s work and the suspicious thrill one gets from its crepuscular tone, The Tracking Shot in Kapò is an astonishingly lucid and intimate account of a defining moment of film criticism which spans the second half of the 20th century from Bazin and Cahiers du cinéma to Jean-Luc Godard’s Histoire(s) du cinéma work and Deleuze’s Cinema<sup>38</sup>

- 20 According to the Cinémathèque Française, the TSK has become “the most famous text by Serge Daney”<sup>39</sup>. So, when in August 2006, *Kapò* was re-released on DVD in France by the prestigious house Carlotta Films, some measures were taken to cope with the fact that Daney had never seen the film and that his promotion of Rivette’s claims could now be discussed from the point of view of the equity of his judgment. Carlotta, for example, added a bonus interview with Rony Brauman, founder of *Médecins du monde* — an expert in refugee camps but not in film criticism. Reviewing the DVD, *Le Monde*’s film critic Jacques Mandelbaum insisted on the fact that *Kapò* “deserves its reputation of being obscene”<sup>40</sup>, as did *Cahiers du cinéma*, whose main editorial told its readers: “you just have to look at the DVD to check how Rivette succeeded in both watching and thinking, since there is definitely a tracking shot and a reframing - even if Rivette’s paper is not only about this single shot but about the entire movie, which indeed is abject”<sup>41</sup>. And the author advises: “these were the aesthetic choices made by Pontecorvo which inspired Rivette the deepest contempt”... Of course, one can discern two errors here: 1) Rivette’s paper is not about the entire movie (see below), and 2) his contempt towards Pontecorvo is a *professional’s* contempt against the filmmaker’s handling of the camera, *not against the moral abjection of showing concentration camps on screen*. More significantly, the real subject matter of the 2006 *Cahiers* editorial was to protest against a “powerful tendency to eliminate all the thinking initiated by film critics”, as led by some mysterious (and unnamed) analysts, technicians and sociologists of cinema<sup>42</sup>.
- 21 Cautiously, the French magazine *DVD Classik* chose to combine journalistic solidarity with *Cahiers du cinéma* all the while recognizing the weakness of Rivette’s criticism of the film. It warns its readers that *Kapò* “draws an insurmountable gap between two irreconcilable factions: the TSK, you’re for or you’re against it”<sup>43</sup>.

## 4. The end of hegemony

- 22 A telltale sign that TSK is now viewed as a cliché even by those critics who are most eager to celebrate film art and the director’s absolute right of ‘life and death’, can be read in the “Little dictionary of the film critic’s received ideas”, written by former *Cahiers du cinéma*’s Editor-in-Chief Charles Tesson. It holds the following entry:

- “Tracking shot: Say it’s a moral matter. Take for example the one in *Kapò*”<sup>44</sup>.

- 23 Another equal sign of decline was the appeal for professional caution made, at the same time, by French filmmaker Gaspar Noé: “I can’t see why one has to be outraged by the tracking shot in *Kapò* and not be outraged by the piano music in *Night and Fog*”<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, TSK can now be pointed out publicly as proof of a lack of film culture, as did Michel Ciment reviewing a collection of essays about the Shoah and the cinema: whereas one

author once more validated the TSK<sup>46</sup>, Ciment criticized the unfair interpretation of *Kapò*, whether it be a “positive” or a “negative” one<sup>47</sup>. As confirmed by the previous debate on *Schindler’s List*, TSK is now more a common place of political discourse used to proclaim the holiness of the Shoah’s memory than a sign of a real cinematic cultivation. The release in 2007 of *La Question humaine*<sup>48</sup>, a film set in the present but whose plot includes the question of concentration camps as a remote cause, confirmed the point by giving critics and viewers ample occasion to re-activate the TSK<sup>49</sup>. The same also applied, in 2007, to the use of the TSK by French historian Bernard Eisenschitz in defence of Leni Riefenstahl<sup>50</sup> — his arguments being dismantled a few months later in the academic French journal of film history *1895*<sup>51</sup>.

- 24 In 2010, the debate over Martin Scorsese’s *Shutter Island* offered a further explicit example of the use of the TSK as a means of political denunciation. Well-known media figure and philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy called-up the TSK in an essay where he used the anathema against Pontecorvo as a model of civic conduct: “The criticism hung over Pontecorvo until his dying day. He was ostracized, almost cursed, for a shot, just one. So shall we just overlook the piles of candy-colored, Photoshopped cadavers in *Shutter Island* that look like they just popped out of a Jeff Koons composition?”<sup>52</sup>. What’s important here isn’t the tracking shot per se (or whatever other stylistic device), but the historical event represented. Although this reading of *Shutter Island* is technically unfair (actually, the scene which takes place in a concentration camp is to be understood as a subjective vision of a deranged person and not, like in *Kapò*, as the “real” view of a camp), it serves to show how the TSK has become an efficient means for mobilizing a highbrow audience sensitive to anti-Semitism; in short, how it has become the equivalent of a political “Stand Clear of the Film”.
- 25 Thus, the *myth* of the TSK came to the end of its “scientific career”, which was precisely that it was not be used as a myth or an anecdote, but as a fact. In 2014, the aesthetical quarrel generated by Steve McQueen’s *12 Years a Slave* brought the opportunity to recognize the personal engagement of the spectator as basis for the moral meaning of the spectacle and thus of a film’s quality. In *Positif*, Alain Masson lamented that “truth once again is beaten by Opinion”. Indeed, in spite of its failures (at least the ones emphasized by Olivier Thirard<sup>53</sup>), a number of French critics used the TSK to dismiss *12 Years a Slave*, as did for example Serge Kaganski in *Les Inrockuptibles*<sup>54</sup>. Yet, McQueen’s is precisely the kind of film which, according to Masson, brings a practical demonstration of the falsity of the aesthetical gaze, understood as an “iron cage”<sup>55</sup> which locks up the regular spectator in an attitude of compassion and prevents the recognition of the director’s know-how and craft.
- 26 Finally, 2014 was also the year when, for the first time in the French academic debate, an author offered his readers two pages to sum up the plot of *Kapò*<sup>56</sup>. In fact, it now looks as though a sort of *statu quo* has set in, as can be seen on blogs hosted by amateur cinephiles: in short, it’s now just as easy to find the TSK being validated (for instance on a philosophical blog<sup>57</sup>) as to find it challenged - some cinephiles prudently reminding their readers of the necessity to refer it back to the *personal* and *autobiographical* project of Serge Daney<sup>58</sup>, or else recognizing that Rivette’s description of *Kapò* “isn’t very accurate”<sup>59</sup>, and carefully exposing some of the epistemological biases at work in various decontextualized uses of the TSK<sup>60</sup>. Let’s analyze the two most important of these biases.

## 5. Two epistemological biases of the TSK

- 27 An obvious bias Rivette resorts to in his comment of the TSK lays in considering the film primarily in terms of its professional use of the camera. By doing so, he confers an ontological primacy to technical objects, including the human actors as physical objects, and assimilates any “ordinary” viewing of the film, as well as the moral sympathy viewers might feel towards the characters, as testimony of their ignorance (i.e., ignorance of the professional practice of cinema and of its proper or correct use). Yet, from the standpoint of the “naturalist ontology” which characterizes Western science (Descola), there cannot be any moral continuity between human beings and objects, but only a physical continuity, because they both belong to the same space and time<sup>61</sup>. The idea of a moral quality of the object is, from the perspective of this ontology, a magical conduct, as is the idolization of film stars. Accordingly, Rivette’s strategy is to expose the confusion the naïve spectator falls victim to when watching *Kapò*.
- 28 A similar strategy is chosen by Daney when he asserts that Riva was “too fat for the part”, the miscasting introducing a new reason for despising the film, namely a lack of professionalism in the casting requiring a complicit (or credulous) viewer. Such criticism, however, rests on an obvious denial of the usual absorption of the regular or “ordinary” spectator, that is to say, a denial of the “distraction” (Benjamin) required for the filmic event to exist<sup>62</sup>. Yet such absorption, moreover, is conceived by Daney as a proof of the malicious intent of every professional who uses their know-how to exploit the good will of the spectator deprived of the professional’s technical gaze. Thus the TSK can be used by Daney to stigmatize a TV broadcast of “rich singers (‘We are the world, we are the children!’) [...] mixing their image with the image of the skinny children” – even if African children were starving *for real* in front of the TV cameras, whereas Emmanuelle Riva was *not* dying for real in *Kapò*. Therefore, viewing a newsreel and watching a fiction film – two activities which, according to Goffman, relate to two distinct spheres of social life or two different kinds of frames pertaining to the collective experience – politics and leisure –, are now fallaciously considered as equivalent. But if so, then what amount of contempt should Jean-Luc Godard deserve when he unabashedly ridicules *real people* in his films, for example the winner of a beauty contest in *Masculin féminin* or an hostel employee in *2 fois 50 ans de cinéma français*?
- 29 The second main epistemological bias of the TSK is its close link with hermeneutics: Rivette and Daney act as if meaning was inscribed *inside* the image, while what counts here is *how it is interpreted*, depending on which cinephiliac paradigm and philosophical belief one prefers to use. Film scholars outside France have sometimes tried to draw attention to this. David Bordwell, for instance, reminds us that Luc Moullet was, among the editors of *Cahiers*, a champion of the deshistoricization of “great movies”<sup>63</sup>. Dudley Andrew – who, by the way, describes the TSK in historical terms – notes that “*Cahiers* has always tied ethics to aesthetics, perhaps submerging the former too deeply in the latter”<sup>64</sup>. But not all authors show such precaution. Jacques Lezra, for instance, provides a quite impressionist reading, complete with frozen frames of *Kapò*, which gives the green light to the TSK. “‘See’, the film seems to say, ‘I am showing you Thérèse’s death from the perspective of what she desires – freedom – so that you too can imagine yourself driven to what she is driven to do. Take her place from outside the place she occupies’”<sup>65</sup>. Not only is his reading counter-intuitive (if Pontecorvo had wanted to show “Thérèse’s death

from the perspective of what she desires", it might well have been preferable to reverse the camera axis, the tracks would then have been *inside* the camp, and we would have been watching an over-the-shoulder shot or a POV shot displaying the fields, the beauties of Polish countryside through the barbwire), but it is clearly possible to interpret this shot and the camera movement in a different way.



Figure Beginning and end of the "infamous" tracking shot. The tracks on which the camera moves in low-angle shot (vertical planar), form a 45° angle with the fence (horizontal planar). Why 45° and why a tracking shot, and why a low-angle one? One of the possible readings of these three technical tunings is the "neoformalist" one<sup>66</sup>: they have an aesthetic purpose, not in the sense of Kant nor Hegel (see below) but in the sense of Baumgarten, since they are intended to convey information. The angle of 45°, like the decision to track in, manage to separate Therese from her inmates and to inscribe (mostly in backlighting) her head in front of the sky, in order to achieve a classical (at least in a Catholic culture) depiction of a journey towards Heaven. While her zombiesque inmates still belong to earth (at the end of the shot, they're submerged by the horizon), Therese reaches the "Kingdom of God". Erich Von Stroheim, when Marushka commits suicide in *Foolish Wives*, or Pier Paolo Pasolini in the last shot of *La Ricotta*, both did the same gesture. What somebody who ties ethics to aesthetics could reproach Pontecorvo is the musical underscoring of the scene, since Therese's run is accompanied by a *crescendo* of perfect chords on a regular tempo, then her death is marked by a dissonant orchestral *tutti*. It would have been more "logical" (in a neoformalist POV, once again) to keep perfect chords for the moment she's freed and the dissonant ones for her run, i.e the moment she still lives under the « dissonant » constraints of the camp.

- 30 As Griselda Pollock notes, the "'politique des auteurs' refuses the distinction between form and content and seeks instead to identify the moral compass of a film as a whole". It seems from then on that, once transposed into fiction, the horror of concentration camps is "exposed to the spectator's voyeurism and worse, the possibility of pornography", especially since cinema, in order to "sell its pleasures to buying customers", has to show "tolerable" events on the screen. This implies modifying whatever horrible truth serves as subject matter and leaving open "an exit strategy for the viewer"<sup>67</sup>. But are there only two strategies, voyeurism and exit? All this sounds a little too behaviorist, for as Libby Saxton suggests:

Viewed through a Kantian lens, tracking shots and other formal techniques would serve as a 'propaedeutic' for morality if they afford viewers an experience of the freedom they possess as moral agents, however problematic such a conception of agency may be for twenty-first-century critics. Such autonomy is validated by Rivette's response to Pontecorvo, which accuses 'le travelling de Kapò' of heteronomy, an attempt to coerce its viewers into a position where they are subject to an external law, a meaning imposed from the outside which alienates them from their freedom as moral subjects<sup>68</sup>

- 31 A particular kind of aesthetics is supposed to fight this behaviorist coercion. Hegel's *kalos* (καλός), which means both beautiful and admirable (Hegel would have preferred the name of aesthetics to be *kalistics*), seems a good candidate to take this part, since it makes beauty, objectively, "the sensible manifestation of the idea". But this is not very helpful in our case, since we are left with the problem of finding *what the idea is*, knowing that the idea is not an objective property of the film but lays mostly in the interpretative reading

we make of it. In addition, there still remains the problem of the balance between beauty and ethical rightness, since an artwork can, through beauty, provide a “sensible manifestation” of a politically disgusting idea. As one can understand when reading Clive Bell’s *Art*<sup>69</sup>, which somehow radicalizes Hegel, the price to pay for accessing Hegelian aesthetic freedom is the vanishing of content, in order to leave space for the “free play of pure form”.

- 32 French philosopher Jacques Rancière admittedly tried to reconcile both form and content when speaking positively of an « aesthetic look », that allows the spectator to be moved by the spectacle of horror when staged by a true artist. Rancière takes the example of W. Eugene Smith’s 1971 *Tomoko Uemura In Her Bath*, the most acclaimed photograph of his *Minamata* series<sup>70</sup>. The horror – the naked girl is deformed due to mercury poisoning – is not only tolerable but edifying, assures Rancière, because the artist succeeded in capturing the aesthetic moment, when the weak left hand of Tomoko took “the aspect of an eagle’s beak”. Thus, aestheticization would be edifying when Smith uses it, because he shows that he is eager to signal to the spectator his artistic gesture, but not when Pontecorvo does so, because the latter forbids, because of the emotional implication he produces, that the spectator be aware of the artistic gesture. The problem clearly resides in the double standard used in this argumentation. It is obvious that it is possible, against Rancière, to criticize Smith because he manipulates the emotion of the viewer by showing the horrific body of a naked girl, even if his the photograph can be celebrated as a demonstration of the damages made to the victims by those people responsible for this tragedy. What is more, Rancière’s inquiry into formal or plastic effects could signal his own personal insensitivity towards the tragedy of the victim. Once a spectacular object has become an object of discourse, its meaning cannot be separated from the context of the exchange and, thus, of what is at stake when we use it as an example in the conversation.

## 6. Back to the situation

- 33 Our analysis of the TSK myth has given us the opportunity to observe this phenomena in the case of Daney himself, and in that of the professional conduct of Rivette with regards to *Kapò*. For Daney, as we have seen, the act of screening *Kapò* didn’t matter at all. Indeed, what was really at stake for him was to support a model of behavior in the viewing of the film, the sharing of a certain faith in an almighty director whose eye and intelligence of the camera are alone worth the price of admission, by converting the film into an artistic lesson in favor of a certain conception of filmmaking. In fact, in Daney’s piece, Rivettes’s review of *Kapò*, the *staging* of his reaction to Pontecorvo’s tracking shot, is converted into an *exemplum*, in the medieval sense of a moral anecdote used to illustrate a point. Just like the medieval preacher, Daney uses it to adorn his discourse, to illustrate a point of doctrine and to emphasize a moral rule: the obligation of those who love the art of the film to resist the use of conventional effects by directors (especially those that absorb viewers into the fiction). In this respect, any spontaneous understanding that Daney’s reader might have had of the action of the character and of its roots in the reality<sup>71</sup> is sufficient to generate in them the feeling that the director sought to increase their emotion by manipulating their gaze.
- 34 Hence, Daney’s discourse cannot be considered apart from the practical context which confers a legitimacy to his proud refusal to watch *Kapò*, a refusal that could otherwise be

understood as a proof of his ignorance and lack of personality. The *Kunstliteratur*, the production of a discourse explicitly aiming at disseminating useful information pertaining to a certain kind of artwork and to help its understanding,<sup>72</sup> becomes the socio-cognitive frame which motivates Daney’s provocative intellectual conduct, materializes its cultural utility, and explains the aesthetic pleasure brought by Rivette’s “words about *Kapò* and the way he appropriates them for his own end. The TSK is thus an excellent illustration of the specificity of “modern cinephilia”, as we propose to describe it, and of the role academic discourse plays in its cultural promotion. It thus helps us recognize the biases at play in the production of a discourse on films chosen *ex post*, converting film practice into physical objects and separating them from a form of organization of experience — in this case, leisure — that otherwise enables the spectator to experience films and to feel, on different terms, the qualitative grade (higher or lower) of the spectacle they have undergone. In leisure as a frame for filmic experience, the spectator’s body is used as a tool of measurement for the quality of the spectacle. The spontaneous assessment of the technical qualities of a film, based on a habit of consumption, is mixed with the assessment of its ethical value, on the grounds of the spectator’s own experience of the spectacle, of their sympathy or antipathy toward the real conduct illustrated by the film, and not *solely* based on their sympathy or antipathy for the technical style of the director. With regards to film, in short, one must distinguish between various frames of experience: the frame of film consumption differs from that of critical discourse and from that of academic discourse, whose orientation is chiefly scientific.

- 35 *Kunstliteratur*, by translating in language the experience of film viewing and by focusing on the film as a work of art, neutralizes any understanding of a film’s meaning as constituted by the bodily experience of its spectator “whose objects of pleasure are becoming objects of knowledge, and not the other way around”<sup>73</sup>. Academic discourse, on the other hand, by focusing on an explanation of film consumption as a whole, uses films as signs of social status, symptoms of collective mentality, and models of technical skills. As such, it builds interpretations that recover and translate the meanings that the consumption of films acquire for individuals and communities. These two socio-cognitive frames ignore and sometimes even explicitly reject — because of its “bodily character” — the “magic” of cinema understood as a spectatorial “body technique”, one that is active in the leisurely practice of film viewing and in the personal construction of a pleasurable moment.
- 36 French sociology of culture has contributed to this rejection of cinema as spectatorial “body technique” while legitimating modern cinephilia as the appropriate mode of consumption of film art, leading to a moral obligation on the consumer’s part to choose to watch art films instead of entertainment films, and to an intellectual obligation to admit the superiority of the expertise of the professional, the artist, the critic, the scholar over one’s expertise as a regular consumer. It has also contributed to promote this modern cinephilia in cultural organizations by suggesting the existence of a link between one’s level of instruction and the ability to assess the artistic quality of a film, according to which popular (and less educated) consumers are deprived of any expertise.
- 37 As we have seen, it is chiefly by focusing on the camera, and by reducing the filmic experience to an encounter with a director, that this French ideology has gained its institutional recognition and is used today to legitimate the cinema as a « middle class art ». As a result, film culture in France appears as a top-down process of education of the

masses. It follows that it is only by taking into account the everyday sense taken by the film experience in the lives of regular viewers that we will rectify this fallacious conception of film culture. For cinephilia initially emerged, and still emerges to this day<sup>74</sup>, from the collective experience of pleasure afforded by cinematic fiction and by the unfettered discussion of the various qualities of films competing on the local market<sup>75</sup>.

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## NOTES

1. On the sociological use of this notion, see Jean-Marc Leveratto, *La Mesure de l'art*, Paris, La dispute, 2000, p. 26-29.
2. On the specificity of this « modern » cinephilia, by opposition to a regular or « classic » cinephilia, see Laurent Jullier and Jean-Marc Leveratto, *Cinéphiles et cinéphilies*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2010. On the place of the TSK in this modern cinephilia, see p. 132.
3. This paper marks the current state of research initiated several years ago. See Laurent Jullier, “Affaire de morale”, in *L'analyse de séquences*, Paris, Armand-Colin, 2002, reprinted in 2011, p. 149-152, and “Les contradictions de l'affaire Kapò”, in *Interdit aux moins de 18 ans*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2008, p. 174-176. Fred Camper kept tracks of an earlier state of this work, in the report he made of the 2001 “Forever Godard” symposium in London Tate Modern: “I witnessed a rather explosive little exchange on the Kapò question between Raymond Bellour on stage and Jullier in the audience” (online : <http://www.fredcamper.com/afilmby/0006701.html>).
4. Jacques Rivette, “Of Abjection”, *Cahiers du cinéma* #120, June 1962, p. 54-55 ; translation by Laurent Kretzschmar, taken from Daney 2004 (see below). Online in French : <http://www.filmfilm.be/post/35119741957/de-labjection-par-jacques-rivette-cahiers-du>
5. According to Paul-Louis Thirard, “Pontecorvo est-il abject ?”, *Positif* n° 543, May 2006, p. 61-62.
6. Luc Moullet, “Sam Fuller: sur les brisées de Marlowe”, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 93, March 1959, reprinted in *Le Goût de l'Amérique*, Antoine de Baecque et Gabrielle Lucantonio (eds), Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 2001, p. 66-79. See English trans. in Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1985, p. 145-155.
7. Luc Moullet, *Piges choisies (de Griffith à Ellroy)*, Paris, Capricci, 2009.
8. Emile Couzinet was a director of low-grade B-movies, therefore at the opposite of Visconti in terms of quality for the critics of the *Cahiers*.
9. Jean Domarchi, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jacques Rivette & Eric Rohmer, “Table ronde sur Hiroshima, mon amour d'Alain Resnais”, *Cahiers du cinéma*, n° 97, July 1959. Reprinted in Antoine De Baecque and Charles Tesson (eds), *La Nouvelle Vague*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 1999, p. 36-62.
10. J. de B. [sic], “Kapò”, *Le Monde*, 05.05.1961.
11. Rivette *ibid.* ; our trans.
12. Pontecorvo joined the (then clandestine) Italian Communist Party in 1941, but left in protest over the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. Jean-Luc Drouin enlightens the “rightism” of the young Rivette in the entry “Extrême-droite” of his *Jean-Luc Godard. Dictionnaire des passions*, Paris, Stock, 2010. As for Godard and Truffaut, he notes that they

expressed more the existential posture of a “lost generation”, despising idealism and claiming their cynism, rather than affirming any political commitment.

13. Serge Daney, “Le travelling de Kapò”, *Trafic* #4, P.O.L., Fall 1992, p. 5-19. Reprinted in Serge Daney, *Persévérance: Entretien avec Serge Toubiana*, P.O.L., 1994, p. 13-39. Online in French : <http://www.filmfilm.be/post/35124287414/le-travelling-de-Kapó-par-serge-daney-traffic-4>. Online in English : “The Tracking Shot in Kapò”, *Senses Of Cinema* #30, Febr. 2004, transl. by Laurent Kretzschmar : [http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/Kapó\\_daney/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/Kapó_daney/). See other essays by Daney in English on: <http://sergedaney.blogspot.fr/>. To see the tracking shot itself (and to read other essays in French on the links between extermination camps and cinema, see the blog “Ethique et politique”: <http://ehitqueetpolitique.blogspot.fr/2011/03/la-representation-impossible.html>).

14. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1979), translated by R. Nice, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 59-60.

15. Antoine De Baecque, *La Cinéphilie : invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture, 1944-1968*, Paris, Fayard, 2003, p. 377. However, note that the cinema isn't dead, and that Daney likely didn't choose to get infected with AIDS at any particular moment.

16. Even in the academic sense of “theory” : Rivette's article has been reprinted in Antoine De Baecque (ed.), *Théories [sic] du Cinéma*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma, 2001, p. 37-40.

17. *Itinéraire d'un ciné-fils : entretiens avec Régis Debray*, directed by Pierre-André Boutang, & Dominique Rabourdin (1992), broadcasted on ARTE French television, then released as a 3 hour-long DVD.

18. A charity VHS single originally recorded by the supergroup “USA for Africa” in 1985.

19. For an overview of the French press' reaction to *Schindler's List*, see Jacques Walter, “*La Liste de Schindler au miroir de la presse*”, *Mots* n°56, 1998, p. 69-89 (online : [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/mots\\_0243-6450\\_1998\\_num\\_56\\_1\\_2366](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/mots_0243-6450_1998_num_56_1_2366)

20. Michel Chion, “Le Détail qui tue la critique de cinéma”, *Libération*, 22.04.1994.

21. Claude Lanzmann, “Holocauste, la représentation impossible”, *Le Monde* 03.03.1994.

22. François Garçon, “Entre l'Holocauste et l'épouvante”, *Vingtième siècle*, n°43, Jul.-Sept. 1994, p. 132-136, here p. 134. Garçon uses the French cute word “potelée” (chubby) when Daney used the far more derogatory “grasse” (fat).

23. At least since his interview in *L'Autre Journal*, n° 12, January 1985.

24. Gérard Wacjman, “‘Saint Paul’ Godard contre ‘Moïse’ Lanzmann ?”, *Le Monde* 03.12.1998. French journalist Jean-Luc Douin later asserted that a film capable of uniting the two perspectives is *The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* by Rithy Panh (2003), since it's made from both archival materials and contemporanean testimonies: Jean-Luc Douin, “Peut-on montrer et filmer l'enfer ?”, *Le Monde*, 28.03.2004.

25. In spite of the French law about negationism, it is still possible to read the original writings of Faurisson on his antisemitic “unofficial blog” : [http://robertfaurisson.blogspot.fr/1998\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://robertfaurisson.blogspot.fr/1998_12_01_archive.html)

26. Jean-Michel Frodon, “Auschwitz, l'éthique et l'innocence”, *Le Monde*, 22.10. 1998.

27. Alain Resnais, “Les photos jaunies ne m'émeuvent pas”, interview by Antoine De Baecque & Claire Vassé, *Cahiers du cinéma*, hors-série “Le Siècle du cinéma”, November 2000, p. 70-75, here p. 74.

28. Carles Torner, *Shoah, une pédagogie de la mémoire*, foreword by Claude Lanzmann, Paris, Ed. de l'Atelier, 2001, p. 25.

29. Georges Didi-Huberman, “Ouvrir les camps, fermer les yeux”, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* vol. 61 n°5, 2006, p. 1011-1049. Online : [www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-2006-5-](http://www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-2006-5-)



page-1011.htm. In this paper, Didi-Huberman reprises the TSK and refuses to extend the same epistemological precautions taken with the Birkenau photographs to a feature-length fiction film.

30. Gérard Wajcman, "De la croyance photographique", *Les Temps Modernes*, vol. 56, n°613, March-May 2001, p. 46-83.

31. Jean-Luc Nancy interviewed by Jean Birnbaum, *Le Monde*, 28.01.2005.

32. Nathalie Heinich, "Les limites de la fiction", *L'Homme*, n° 175-176, 3<sup>e</sup> trim. 2005, p. 57-76, here p. 64.

33. Nathalie Nezick, "Le travelling de Kapò ou le paradoxe de la morale", *Vertigo* n°17, 1998, p. 160-164, here p. 164.

34. Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, "Bien dans le tableau", *Le Monde*, 24.12.1999.

35. Online : <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/actualites/communiq/aillagon/rapportBK.pdf>

36. See *Interdit aux moins de 18 ans*, *op. cit.*, p. 73-75.

37. Its title is : *Par ailleurs le cinéma est un divertissement... Propositions pour le soutien à l'action culturelle dans le domaine du cinéma*. Online : [http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/actualites/rapports/auclaire/Rapport%20CCfinal-V4bis\\_051208.pdf](http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/actualites/rapports/auclaire/Rapport%20CCfinal-V4bis_051208.pdf)

38. See link in note 12. The sentence remains ambiguous: one doesn't know if Daney is "astonishingly lucid" about himself or about Pontecorvo's gesture.

39. Axelle Ropert, "Serge Daney, anatomie d'un succès", initially written in 2005 and reprinted for the retrospective "Serge Daney : 20 ans après" at the Cinémathèque Française during the Summer of 2012 ; online : <http://www.cinematheque.fr/fr/musee-collections/actualite-collections/actualite-patrimoniales/serge-daney-anatomie.html>

40. Jacques Mandelbaum, "Kapò : les ficelles de Gillo Pontecorvo pour rendre l'abjection des camps", *Le Monde*, 03.08.2006.

41. Unsigned (but probably written by Jean-Michel Frodon, who was then *Editor-in-Chief*) "Editorial", *Cahiers du cinéma* n°615, September 2006, p. 5.

42. This corporate-like strategy is well-known and can be summed up as: « I've got the right to criticize but you don't have the right to criticize me in return, because it would appear as a challenge of my own right to criticize ».

43. Xavier Jamet, review of *Kapò*, DVD Classik website, 9.10.2006, online: <http://www.dvdclassik.com/critique/Kapò-pontecorvo>

44. Charles Tesson, "Petit dictionnaire des idées reçues de la critique", *Panic*, n°4 juil./août 2006.

45. "La bouche de Gaspar", interview with Olivier Père, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 17.02.1998.

46. Jean-Michel Frodon (ed.), *Le Cinéma et la Shoah. Un art à l'épreuve de la tragédie du Xxe siècle*, Paris, Cahiers du Cinéma, 2007. Frodon already calls-up the TSK up in 1998, see above. For a different criticism of the ethical misdemeanors denounced in this 2007 book, see the review by Vincent Lowy in *Questions de communication* n°14, 2008, p. 320-323, online: <http://questionsdecommunication.revues.org/1336>

47. Michel Ciment, "La Shoah prise en otage", *Positif* n°565, March 2008, p. 3. The best example of the latter, writes Ciment, remains the TSK, since Daney "never even saw the film".

48. US title : *The Heart Detector*, Nicolas Klotz, 2007

49. As does Mathilde Girard in her « Le Cinéma, la mémoire sous la main », *Chimères* n° 66-67, 2008, p. 257-278.

50. Kevin Brownlow & Bernard Eisenschitz, "George Stevens rencontre Leni Riefenstahl", *Cinéma 014*, Paris, Léo Scheer, Nov. 2007.

51. François Albéra, "Leni Riefenstahl dans le *Journal* de Joseph Goebbels (1929-1944)", 1895 n°55, 2008, p. 139-154. Online: <http://1895.revues.org/4108>
52. Bernard-Henri Lévy, "De Tarantino à Scorsese : quand Hollywood flirte avec le révisionnisme", *La Règle du Jeu*, 2010 (on line : <http://laregledujeu.org/2010/03/03/1011/de-tarantino-a-scorsese%E2%80%89-quand-hollywood-flirte-avec-le-revisionnisme/>). In English : "Hollywood's Nazi Revisionism. Doesn't the Truth Here Make a Good Enough Story?", *Wall Street Journal*, 2010-03-05.
53. See note 5.
54. See the review online : <http://www.lesinrocks.com/cinema/films-a-l-affiche/12-years-slave/>
55. To quote *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism* by Max Weber.
56. Jennifer Cazenave, "Retour sur Kapó: Histoire d'une 'abjection'", *Critique et violence*, Eric Marty & Jérémie Majorel, Paris, Hermann, 2014, p. 51-66.
57. Marianne Pistonne, "La morale est-elle affaire de travelling?", 17.02.2011, website "Les Jeudis Philo du Vieux Lille", <http://zenon59.free.fr/La%20morale%20est%20elle%20affaire%20de%20travelling.htm>
58. Rémy Besson, " Crainte et tremblement : Serge Daney", 01.08.2010, on the website "Cinémadoc", <http://culturevisuelle.org/cinemadoc/2010/08/01/crainte-et-tremblement-serge-daney/>
59. On a website called *L'observatoire*, which adds an excellent critical apparatus to Rivette's paper : <http://simpleappareil.free.fr/lobservatoire/index.php?2009/02/24/62-de-l-abjection-jacques-rivette>
60. "Pièce à convictions, 15/08/2006, <http://inisfree.hautetfort.com/tag/gillo+pontecorvo>
61. On the different ontologies which characterize, from an anthropological point of view, the perception of images, see Philippe Descola (ed), *La fabrique des images*, Paris, Musée du Quai Branly-Somogy, 2010. For their application to the theatre and to cinema, see Jean-Marc Leveratto, « Anthropologie du spectacle et savoirs de la qualité », in André Helbo, Catherine Bouko et Elodie Verlinden (eds), *Interdiscipline et arts du spectacle vivant*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2013, p. 27-44
62. On this point, see Jullier & Leveratto, « La compétence du spectateur distrait : cinéma et 'distraction' chez Walter Benjamin », *Théorème* n°21: "Persistances benjaminienes", O. Aïm, P. Boutin, J. Chervin & G. Gomez-Mejia (eds), Paris, PSN, p. 97-110.
63. David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 79-82.
64. Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is!*, Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 24.
65. Jacques Lezra, *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic*, especially chap. "Is Travelling Still a Moral Matter?", New York : Fordham University Press, 2010, p. 193-201, here p. 196-7.
66. When « form and content are related to each other in a satisfyingly appropriate manner » : Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art. A Contemporary Introduction*, New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 126.
67. Griselda Pollock, "Death in the Image: The Responsibility of Aesthetics in *Night and Fog* (1955) and *Kapó* (1959)", *Concentrationary Cinema. Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog*, Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds), New York-Oxford, Berghahn, 2012, p. 258-301, here p. 265-6.

68. Libby Saxton, "Tracking Shots are a Question of Morality': Ethics, Aesthetics, Documentary", *Film and Ethics. Foreclosed Encounters*, Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton eds, New York, Routledge, 2010, p. 22-35, here p. 28.
69. Clive Bell, *Art*, 1914 ; online : [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16917](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16917)
70. Jacques Rancière, "L'œil esthétique", *Art press* n°273, nov. 2001, p. 19-23. To see Smith's picture: <http://www.journeyamerica.us/tomoko-and-mother-in-the-bath/>
71. As Primo Levi wrote, in his account of life at Auschwitz, "at any given moment you could always go and touch the electric wire-fence". This is how Iakov Djougachvili, one of Staline's three sons, died: by running into an electric fence in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Primo Levi, *If this is a Man: Remembering Auschwitz* (1947), Summit Books, 1986, p. 100
72. For a sociological understanding of *Kunstliteratur* as the application of the "graphic reason" (Jack Goody) to cultural consumption and of its strategic role in the modern evaluation of the work of art, see Jean-Marc Leveratto, *La Mesure de l'art*, *op. cit.* (NB : "graphic reason" — i.e. the cognitive effects of the practice of writing — is a term used in the title of the French translation of Goody's *Domestication of the Savage Mind* and coined in the American translation of Pierre Bourdieu's *Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press, 1990, note 12, p. 286).
73. Jean-Louis Schefer, *L'Homme ordinaire du cinéma*, Paris, Gallimard-Cahiers du cinéma, 1980.
74. Cf. *Cinéphiles et cinéphilies*, *op. cit.*, p. 203-219.
75. The authors are very grateful to Martin Lefebvre for his proofreading of the entire manuscript.

## ABSTRACTS

“Kapò’s tracking shot” is a formula by Jacques Rivette that became a myth of orthodox cinephilia at the hands of Serge Daney and a number of other intellectuals. But it is first and foremost a commonplace used to mobilize a particular way of looking at films. This article traces the sources of this myth, of its success and examines what it reveals of a certain doxa in matters of film consumption. We then move to question the problem it raises — that of the “correctness” of an artistic gesture — from a different perspective, one more open to the idea of “frames of experience” (Goffman).

Le « travelling de Kapò », formule critique de Jacques Rivette devenue un mythe de la cinéphilie orthodoxe sous l’impulsion de Serge Daney et bien d’autres intellectuels, est avant tout un lieu commun mobilisé pour légitimer un « certain regard » sur les films. L’article examine les origines du succès de ce mythe et ce qu’il révèle de la doxa en matière de consommation cinématographique, avant d’aborder le problème qu’il soulève (celui de la justesse du geste artistique) sous un autre angle, plus ouvert aux « cadres de l’expérience » (Goffman).

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** cinéphilie, critique de film, Serge Daney, Jacques Rivette, Shoah, interprétation, visual studies

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Ils ont notamment publié ensemble : "La leçon de vie dans le cinéma hollywoodien", Vrin, 2008 ; "Les hommes-objets au cinéma", Armand Colin, 2009 ; "Cinéphiles et cinéphilies: Une histoire de la qualité cinématographique", Armand Colin, 2010.

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