

THE GEOMETRY OF A CROSS-EYED SUBJECT

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As an artist, she has worked in different formats, including video, performance and sound. Both in her solo works and group projects she is concerned with socio-political questions.



My deliberations over the incident described below have brought me to the edge of my mathematical capabilities, which are not, admittedly, especially developed. Still, to me it seemed vital to reconstruct the situation geometrically in order to understand what was happening to my eyesight. Basically, I started going cross-eyed in a strange sort of way. Not that I was seeing double; instead, a hole developed exactly in the middle of my field of vision – meaning straight ahead, when looking from my seat in the cinema in the House of World Cultures – and it permitted me to look only at the left and right sides flanking the projection screen.

The incident occurred during the programme *Documentary Moments* at the Documentary Forum in Berlin. The filmmaker Eyal Sivan announced the previously unscreened film *Henchman Glance*, which Chris Marker had passed on to him, and which is based on Alain Resnais' short fictionalised documentary film about Nazi concentration and extermination camps, *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955). However, the film explicitly does not originate from Marker himself. As became evident, *Henchman Glance* is composed of simple

Image of the Israeli trial against Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961. This was the image used by Penguin Books in 1994 for the cover of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

edits (shot /countershot) of two plot threads that get synchronised through the editing. *Night and Fog* was cut together with the recordings of the trial of the State of Israel vs. the Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann. One sees Adolf Eichmann from above, a slightly slanted frontal shot. He sits in a glass booth, his gaze directed ahead, and apparently, or in fact, watches a screening of the film *Night and Fog*, which can be seen alternating with the images of Eichmann himself. The sound of *Night and Fog* runs continuously through all the film's images. According to Eyal Sivan, *Night and Fog* was in fact shown to Eichmann during the trial. Chris Marker reconstructed this occurrence through editing.

I was already unprepared for what was about to unfold on the screen because I had never seen *Night and Fog*. But as early as the first minutes of the film, I was predominantly preoccupied with my optic apparatus, which had gone completely haywire. I simply could not look at the screen. But I was also unable to exit the cinema. It was one of those events that one attends out of respect, above all if one has grown up in Germany. So for thirty-three minutes my eyes wandered aimlessly along the dark edges of the projection. In the corner of my eye I hazily chased the screen in hopes that something would change and enable me to look at it again. Like when I was a child, secretly watching scary movies that I actually could not endure. I had always said to myself, now that you have begun, you have to 'see' how it turns out.

In his book *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Lacan through Popular Culture* (1991), Slavoj Žižek describes a scene from the film *Manhunter* (1986) in which the policeman watches super 8 films belonging to murdered families over and over again in order to learn something about the murderer's motive. He discovers the thing that connects the families: they all had their film developed in the same laboratory. And ultimately that is where the murderer is found. As Žižek says, the irony of the film lies in how the policeman's method, on a formal level, creates a perversion. The perversion consists of the overlapping, or even coincidence, between his gaze and that of the murderer. His method requires that he view the super 8 films with the eyes of the murderer. In the course of this operation, the subject splits and his gaze becomes perverse. The perverse gaze onto the victim takes place in faithful service to none other than that victim, in its name, and in its interests. Žižek places this overlapping of gazes into a correlation with pornography, which I have yet to fully grasp. Here, pornography is the genre that shows all there is to show, hiding nothing from view, while in a radical way bringing about

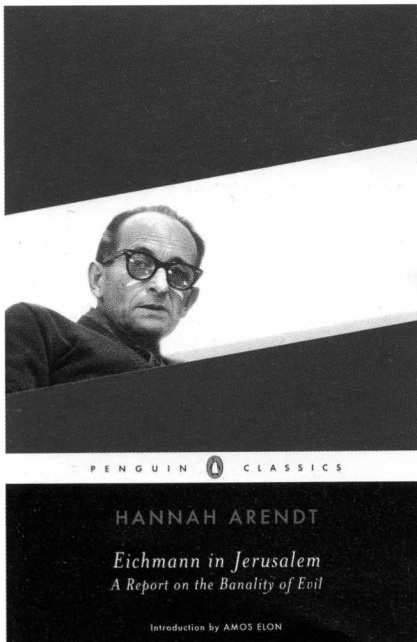
the loss of the side view. But maybe the feedback that emerges from the short circuiting of complex fields of vision helps to reconstruct the hole, which occurred during the screening of *Henchman Glance*. Neither the subject-object relation, nor the associated lines of sight arising while showing images, are *unidirectional*. The object gazes back, and depending on what the intention of the production of that relation is, this gaze, owing to circumstances, gets reflected back. If I understand the concept of *jouissance* correctly, it is to be found precisely here. The subject is penetrated by the object's gaze and vice versa, and the principle of pain within this relationship turns into a suffering that, to be sure, differs from an emphatic compassion.

In my contemplation of Eichmann, of how he contemplates the horrible crimes he helped commit, I attempt, on the one hand, to see the pictures with his eyes. This means that I take on his gaze, placing my gaze parallel to his, and I try to see what he sees in the images of the concentration camp. I do this in the name of the victim, as does the policeman in *Manhunter*. On the other hand, I try to read his face. This means that I watch from the opposite direction, from *Night and Fog* towards Eichmann's face, and I try to recognise where and how his face is stimulated by the images. Thus, on the one hand, Eichmann in his glass booth seems like a wild animal in the zoo; on the other hand, he sits next to me, so to speak, and passes me his popcorn. It is probably clear that something perverse, maybe pornographic, occurs here; but, as it seems to me, the question of what part I play in this is only answerable geometrically. On which axis is the eye of the subject located, and from which cut-set does the object gaze back; and, above all, which coordinates are subject and object here?

When two sets intersect, a cut-set comes into existence. In my case, at the moment of the screening of *Henchman Glance*, intersections emerged that created a hole in the projection screen instead of a cut-set. Like an endless feedback loop that happens when one pivots the axis of the camera and holds it towards the screen. A feedback that needed me as a coordinate in order to pivot the axis. The emergence of a hole during this event may lie in my coordinate's inability to develop a direction or a radius of action within the array of *Henchman Glance*, making my coordinate begin to rotate. The murderer, the evil, is already well-known and, yes, already put to death, and therewith the motivation for my complicity draws a blank. The already-well-known axis with the coordinates murderer/policeman-witness/victim, which uses the policeman-witness in order

to rectify the murderer/victim axis (and therefore has a clear direction) turns around on itself, becomes locked into a zombified loop of the resurrection of evil. In the process, a blindness-causing monster emerges from the screen, whose motive we will surely never be able to resolve; for here it is the idea of evil-in-itself, in its totalitarian monumentality, that is being animated.

The cover of my edition of Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1994) also shows the courtroom of Eichmann's trial. One sees Eichmann in the glass booth, from above, a slightly slanted frontal shot; before him, set up with the same line of sight as Eichmann, stands a 16 mm projector that gets truncated at the edge of the picture. One does not see what Eichmann sees. The other people in the image – three police officers guarding, one person who sits behind the projector, and another person wearing headphones – look with Eichmann in the direction of the projection. Our gaze stays on the side axis, and something in this graph stays incomplete, exits the picture, so to speak. It is the gaze-axis of Eichmann that we unavoidably incorporate, that directs us, however, not onto the 16 mm projection, but into the inside of the book and therewith into Hannah Arendt's deliberations over the banality of evil. Here too the incorporation of the axis of the gaze enables the monster's exit from the glass booth, though not in the sense of him taking our gaze hostage, but, rather, in the sense of his gaze being taken apart, being dismantled into everyday-seeming decisions that are met, decisions that are capable of creating the monstrous. Something becomes apperceptible, allowing for a process of cognition.



In the newest edition (2006) of the Penguin Classics Series, the cover image of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was, interestingly, replaced. Instead of the courtroom, the cover now shows a slanted image of Eichmann, looking from above into the camera. With this gaze looking down on us and the magnified eyes caused by his thick spectacles, he seems to target the viewer. The figure of Eichmann is cropped, out of context. A slanted white stripe forms the background behind his head and chest, framed above and below by blue spaces. Obviously this gaze does not lead into the book. The film continues. N.S.H.

In April 2010, **Natascha Sadr Haghghian** participated in *On Artistic Research*, a lecture series held at MACBA that will be compiled in the *Contratextos* collection, which is published jointly by MACBA and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. In 2011, she will present her new work at the Capella MACBA. This production furthers the concerns of her earlier work, which revolves around the notion of 'representation' and the recovery of archives from art centres. An interview with the artist is available in audio format at www.macba.cat