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A QUARTERLY PSYCHOANALYTIC FORUM

# REVIEW

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## DAS UNBEHAGEN

David LICHTENSTEIN, Editor

In late March 2012, about 30 psychoanalysts, psychoanalytic students, and candidates from several different institutions and affiliations in New York, a group composed for the most part of those who are nowadays referred to as *early career professionals*, gathered to talk about the contemporary state of psychoanalytic formation and training. They met under the signifier *Unbehagen*, a reference of course to Freud's text *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930). But how should we take the meaning of this *Unbehagen*? When the essay was first being translated into English,

Freud suggested to the translator, Joan Riviere, that it might be rendered as *Man's Discomfort in Civilization*. But she settled on *Civilization and its Discontents*. The German dictionary *Langenscheidt* simply suggests *unease* for *Unbehagen*. In his introduction, James Strachey writes that the French word *malaise* might best capture Freud's meaning.

The malaise that concerned Freud was a consequence of the loss of passion that he considered to be a necessary sacrifice for living in civilized society. Sexual passions, and also especially the passion of unrestrained aggression, were simply too disruptive to

complex groups and to interdependent lives lived in the close quarters of civilized society. If for Freud this *Unbehagen* was the inescapable condition of civilized life, why would a group of psychoanalysts organize a meeting under this concept, as though there were something, some particular *discontent* in their lot, which could be addressed and perhaps alleviated? Were they casting doubt on Freud's infamous pessimism about the inevitable conditions of civilized life? Were they asserting a naïve belief that they should escape this universal fate?

Of course, not all social discontent is of the same type. It might be that people



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## FILM

# Making Time

Bettina MATHES

In a city under siege, *time* (not space) is the enemy. If I had only one sentence to describe my experience of watching Šejla Kamerić's and Anri Sala's collaborative project *1395 Days Without Red*, this would be it: *In a city under siege, time (not space) is the enemy.*

The city is Sarajevo, the time are the 1,395 days that the Serbian army terrorized the besieged citizens from the surrounding mountains. An invisible enemy, lying in wait. Sala and Kamerić created, developed, and shot their project together but made two separate films edited from the same footage. Both films evoke the terror and devastation brought about by the siege without showing it. No images of wounded or dead bodies, bomb craters, or demolished buildings are given. Instead, we follow a young woman on her solitary journey across town. What we cannot see (but some of us remember having seen) is more important than what is presented to us on the screen. In this mental cityscape (where people don't do what people normally do in films: speak), sound functions as a time machine that gives both films their distinct tempo, temperament, and temporality, creating a temporal space at odds with itself. Often we hear one thing—sections from Tschaikovsky's *Pathétique*, for example—and see another—a woman walking on the street, people waiting at a corner; and when we see what we hear—the Sarajevo Symphony Orchestra rehearsing—the image says just that: this is what a rehearsal looks like. The disconnect between the visual (space) and the aural (time) and the lack of speech and narrative make us wonder what it means to be in the world with others. We all need and seek relationships, but for some of us there are moments, days, weeks, months, even years when we cannot afford to be attuned to those around us. What it looks (and sounds) like when separation becomes a way of living *together* is (among other things) what *1395 Days Without Red* is about.



*At first glance* the two films look identical: a young woman (played by Spanish actress Maribel Verdú), smartly clad in steel blue turtleneck and wool overcoat, black jeans, comfortable boots, and fashionable leather rucksack is crossing a melancholic urban landscape devoid of human connection and fellow feeling: the city of Sarajevo. Her face earnest and determined, her long black hair tied into a knot, we don't know where she's headed or where she's coming from. A solitary figure. This is not our typical *flâneuse* strolling the streets of Sarajevo in search of an urban experience, this is dangerous business: *Don't go, don't go with the flow!* she seems to tell herself. Over and over, time and again. As she stops at crossings and intersections, we watch her joining small clusters (group would be the wrong word here) of men and women, just like her trying to determine the "right" moment to cross what since the beginning of the siege has been called "Sniper Alley." Not a word, not a look of recognition; no greetings, no embraces. No one follows anybody's lead. Nothing is shared. What moves her? How does she stay sane?

Filmmakers are, of course, experts on making and manipulating time (and space). They can be snipers waiting for the decisive moment, the perfect shot; they can be conductors using reality to create a time of difference, a temporal experience that evokes the subjective rhythm of the unconscious. Sala and Kamerić are both, which is why in *1395 Days Without Red* they are able to tell us something both vivid and subtle about the obvious fact that it takes time to survive a siege.

Psychoanalysts are, of course, also experts on the making and manipulation of time (and space). Freud envisioned the psychoanalytic setting as a form of siege, a "trial of patience" in which the patient must be brought to accept the idea that his illness is "an enemy worthy of mettle"; and that what he has come for is murder—"one cannot kill an enemy who is absent or not within range"—while "the doctor has nothing else to do than wait and let

*The art of perfect timing: kill time before time kills you?*

*In this deadly trial of patience the roles are predetermined. There are those who have nothing else to do than to wait for the decisive moment, that moment of equilibrium when the sniper and his target are in sync. And there are those who must find ways to move about the city out of sync, out of step, out of breath—anticipating the decisive moment, and avoid it. Survival depends upon making one's own time.*

*As every child knows, killing time is a losing game (breathing is our earliest way of knowing that we need more time), but there are adults who know how to use time to kill: snipers, photographers, psychoanalysts, on occasion.*

*They're out there in the mountains, invisible, waiting for someone to step into the visual traps they have set up. They see what I see. Like photographers, like spectators in a movie theater, like psychoanalysts they look forward to that decisive moment when she reveals herself as vulnerable. They let things and people take their course. You can't kill an enemy who is absent or not within range. If they hold fast to this conviction, they will be conducting the siege along the right lines. When she enters the trap, when her appearance coincides with his gaze (and mine), the distance between them gives way to a shared experience: her time is his time. This is the intimacy we have learned to prefer and desire. Synchronicity. The excitement and pleasure of the proper moment. Shot. Freeze frame. Never a reverse shot.*

*If time not space is the enemy, how to make it an accomplice, enlist it as a double agent?*

*Time, time, she reassures herself...time is on my side. If she didn't entrust herself to the rhythm and tempo of this music only she can hear (remembered music, a tune that moves her, keeps her going—just as a lullaby used to put her to sleep when she was a child), traversing the city would seem an impossible risk.*

*They are waiting, certain that they have all the time in the world. But she knows how to make her own time, a time that is hers and hers alone: there's an orchestra in her mind, performing parts of the first movement*

## FILM

things take their course, a course which cannot be avoided nor always hastened." The analyst must be alert, as "the patient brings out of the armoury of the past the weapons with which he defends himself against the progress of the treatment—weapons which we must wrest from him one by one." Not surprisingly, when Freud writes about war (as he does in his 1915 essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death"), he has very little to say that may help us think through the *times* of war.

*At second glance* each of the two films has its own rhythm and tempo. Reflections and refractions of each other (the films are meant to be shown simultaneously in a gallery space), subtle differences in timing create two different journeys across the city. Sala's film is driven by fear: fast-paced, forward-looking, suspenseful. Kamerić's version moves according to the quieter and more hesitant rhythm of mourning and melancholia (a more time-consuming mode, her film is 20 minutes longer than Sala's): slow-paced, reflective, backward-looking. Together they create a third space that is entirely aural—a space created by the films' sound and music as it leaves the frame of one film and travels toward the other. This is not only a statement about the impossibility of choosing between escape and withdrawal as we respond to danger and loss; it is a vivid and moving evocation of how in times of trauma we depend on our ability to make time, and step out of sync.

If we cannot speak about time without evoking space, Donald Winnicott's *The Place Where We Live* seems an obvious text to start thinking about, from a psychoanalytic point of view, what it means to make time. Doing so involves a slight shift of attention: where Winnicott asks *where*, I ask *when*. Where Winnicott is concerned with a potential space where "cultural experience and play" take place, I'm concerned with describing the *potential time* when we feel we are in sync with someone else. Winnicott's question is, "What, for instance, are we doing when we are listening to a Beethoven symphony?" My question is, "What kind of time, for instance, are we making when we are listening to a Tchaikovsky symphony?"

Winnicott begins his essay with the "wish to examine the place, using the word in an abstract sense, where we *most of the time* are *when* we are experiencing life...when we are doing what in fact we are doing a great deal of our time, namely, enjoying ourselves." We are, he proposes, situated in a "potential space" that mediates between the world of inner psychic reality and the world of outer reality. This potential or third space is the space in which we live and play with others—together alone, attached yet separate. It is a space of possibilities, where we become involved and form relationships.

This potential space may be large or small, colorful or painted in shades of grey; a space that we learn to make as we separate from those who took care of us when we were infants. "Playing and cultural experience," Winnicott goes on, "are things we value in a special way; these link the past, the present and the future; *they take up time and space*." Put in the vocabulary of temporality, "cultural experience" happens when we are in sync with one or more people; when we are on the same wavelength. Although most people most of the time feel a natural inclination to form attachments and become attuned to one another, this third area is never simply there; it needs to be built and maintained. It depends, says Winnicott, "for its existence on living experiences," and it requires our active involvement—even though we may not always be aware that what we're doing is taking place, and making time.

Yet there are times when it becomes necessary to avoid this third space—a siege is one of those times—and it is precisely through making our own time that we can avoid being hit by the unpredictable possibilities that are bound to occur in the third space of cultural experience. But how does one make one's own time? And what happens to us when we are forced to live a life out of step?

*of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. In her own private performance of the Pathétique she is the conductor, the one who determines the tempo. Yes, time is on her side. But how long can one live a life out of sync, a life attuned to an inner rhythm and melody that no one else can hear? If time is on her side, what happens to those who are on the other side of time?*

*Her alarm bells...they should be ringing, they should be ringing! Standing at the smashed window of an abandoned storefront, treading on shattered glass; the sound of shards crushing under her soles. Kristallnacht. How have I been here before, she wonders. History doesn't repeat itself—we do. She hears the mirror break. A quick look over her shoulder: has anyone been listening? If you think this is over, then you're wrong. Keep moving.*

*Deliberation. Separation. Isolation. Here she is, approaching a queue of men and women who wait at an intersection, each of them quietly turned inward, gathering strength, preparing to cross the alley where they know the sniper lies in wait. What under normal circumstances would be a natural opportunity to connect, a moment of joyful merging, a shared experience of fellow feeling, now seems impossible, dangerous. Slowly she proceeds to the front of the queue, her movements captured in a long tracking shot (as if she was motivated, pushed forward by some invisible force). Now she stops (is stopped?) beside an older woman; side by side, shoulder to shoulder they stand.*

*If they are aware of one another, they do not show it. Something's not quite right yet. Tilting her head slightly, moving forward one more step, highly concentrated as if following directions of an inaudible voice (radio-head), her profile now blocks our view of the other woman's face—overlay. As she is wiping her out, I feel the kindness contained in this effacement. Is this how they take care of one another? Is this the necessary price of living a life out of sync while retaining some kind of humanity? This is a good time to run.*

*Now. She made it! All of a sudden love seems a possibility. A tête à tête with the orchestra's bassoonist. His music fills her ears, soothing, reassuring. A short moment of bliss. It doesn't matter that they can't see or know of one another. (I can.) He is inside rehearsing, she is out on the streets. This is not a sentimental or romantic moment. This is about one person making time for another, and the love contained in that making of time. As she starts humming, life returns, sunlight caresses her face. Not all has been lost.*

*Here is where Sala's film is more satisfying, more optimistic. If you were waiting for a moment of connectedness, this is it. Kamerić will not, cannot spare us the disappointment and frustration. Her rendering of this intimate encounter in time is filled with sadness: the music subdued, almost inaudible. Now that she feels it, it's gone. Much time, too much time has been lost. The duet with the bassoonist may bring relief but the time he makes for both of them cannot, will not make up for those hours, days, months spent alone, out of sync. This is what she has learned: mourning is time consuming, it eats up our time; and it denies her what we normally take for granted when we make time: identifying a beginning, and knowing when to stop. As mourners we cannot know that it's over until it's over.*

*How come I end up where I started?*

*"Tempo, tempo!" She's been making good progress. And then the unexpected happens: her eyes meet his. A fearful, restless, hurting gaze. Feral. For a split second her time is his time. "It could be said," Winnicott writes, "that with human beings there can be no separation, only a threat of separation." They take each other's breath away. There is danger in this sudden unexpected intimacy. What if it happens again, with the wrong person? He is coming from where she must go. He made it through the wide and open intersection. A danger area if there ever was one. They don't speak. They both know that in order to stay safe they must disengage; already they have taken up too much of each other's time (and space). And time is the one thing they cannot afford to waste. She feels his exhaustion and he feels her fear. That's when she knows she can do it. Fear is a way toward the future. Tempo, tempo. There's no time to analyze. As she makes it to the other side, unharmed, out of breath, momentarily relieved, her favorite theme comes to mind. She starts humming, her breath and the music are one. She's alone, in unison. Tchaikovsky saved her life. If she had an iPod, would she use it?*

## FILM

After breathing, music is our next best way to make time, our own time. “Tempo, Tempo!” “Allegro.” “Let’s do it again.” “Go slower.” The only words spoken in both films are those of conductor Ari Benjamin Meyers, whom we watch rehearsing sections of Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* with the Sarajevo Symphony Orchestra in what looks like a socialist-style community center—people come and go, many stay and listen in for a while, attentive yet absent-minded, taking in the music as if replenishing their ears, a resource from which they draw when they are in need of time, rhythm, and pace. Meyers’s directions provide cues and orientation not only for the members of the orchestra but even more so for the citizens on their outings. The orchestra and its conductor are the safe keepers of time: as long as they continue to play, time will be on their side; and as long as there is music, there will be ways of making time—our time, not the enemy’s. The Sarajevo Symphony Orchestra, which performed throughout the siege (though not under Meyers), is where the city feels its pulse, its heartbeat, and its inspiration.

To live a life out of sync is to suspend the ability to imagine oneself in someone else’s shoes. Without a shared temporal space there can be no identification and no empathy. For Winnicott, the third space of play and creativity grows out of “the capacity in the therapist (or the mother) to identify with the patient (or the child) out of a feeling ‘if I were in your shoes.’” In times of war, forced to make our own personal time, we backtrack, retrace our steps until we reach a point in time when the other’s needs and vulnerabilities move out of focus. Psychologically speaking, we go back to the time of childhood when the baby has not yet separated the mother from the self. But whereas the baby does not yet know what empathy means, the adult, coaxed into unkindness, must bear the guilt of her selfishness.

*Après-coup.* Can we imagine the same project with a male figure traversing the city and a female musical director conducting the orchestra? Say Javier Bardem taking cues from JoAnn Falletta or Xian Zhang? Hardly. Not only because most of us find it difficult to imagine that in times of trouble a real man would adapt to the tempo and rhythm of a woman. The idea of Bardem (or any male celebrity for that matter) moving sideways rather than confronting the enemy head-on contradicts our cultural notions of masculinity. Women, not men, are perceived as deviant, weak, and vulnerable (the prototypical victim). Women are (we are made to believe), qua gender, naturally out of step, tactless, unreliable. This “unpredictability” has largely served to keep women away from the military as well as from political and economic power. But their assumed lack of tact has also given them the freedom to resist the pressures (and temptations) of walking lockstep with those who hold power. From a historical perspective the male body has been under much greater stress to submit to the rule of synchronization—the military is just one example, classical music is another—which is precisely why men feel inclined (and entitled) to control time (and space). Not always to their own advantage.

If I had only one sentence to describe my experience of watching Šejla Kamerić and Anri Sala’s *1395 Days Without Red*, this would be it: *If you think this is over, then you’re wrong.*

*To Nicola Burg for the time being.*



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### CREDITS

*1395 Days Without Red* by Šejla Kamerić, Anri Sala in collaboration with Ari Benjamin Meyers, 2011. Šejla Kamerić’s film is 65 minutes long, and Anri Sala’s film, made in collaboration with Liria Begeja, is 43 minutes long.

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