

Overture, First Movement

The Invention of *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*

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So it's through music that Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet came to the cinema. Through music did they come to the desire of making movies, of making one movie in particular, long before they could get the means to realise their intentions. They reminded that several times: their two first projects weren't their first films. *Moses und Aron*, from the 1930-1932 Schoenberg opera, was shot at the end of the summer of 1974; but the idea was born fifteen years earlier, in 1958-59, four years before their first film, *Machorka-Muff* (1962). *Moses* was released in 1975—their eighth work. And even earlier, first and foremost, there was *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*.

Jean-Marie Straub has always dated quite precisely the birth of the “Bachfilm” project: November 1954. That year, that moment, was important for him. This is the month he moved to Paris, after three years at the Universities of Strasbourg and Nancy. He's back from the Venice Festival, about which he has written in the *Rythmes 1954* review, his first published critics that we know of. He is twenty-one. On November 1 took place the first actions of the F.L.N. against the French colonizers, marking the beginning of the Algerian Revolution. And in Paris, that fall, in the preparatory classes to the French state film school (IDHEC) of the Lycée Voltaire, he met Danièle Huillet, who “wanted to make documentaries in Africa”, and who had “discovered Schoenberg at 16, listening to the radio. I didn't know what it was, but I said to myself ‘Good grief, it's magnificent!’”

Bach, Schoenberg. Even before the first films, all of Huillet and Straub's musical universe is already in place. As though it were this universe, this music (and these texts), these composers and these works, that were the fundamental landmarks, *before* film. The transition to cinema, Danièle Huillet says, “was not about becoming filmmakers, it was about making one particular film.” Straub goes on: “I had an obsession and I had to free myself from it: it was to shoot that film called *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. I had never thought of making films, I wanted to write on films, at the beginning, a little, like that, and I did it too, very little; and then one day that *Bach* project fell on my head... I fell into it²...”

So the *Chronik* project has been crucial straight away, driving all that will follow. It is not only a musical project: Straub builds up for it (and for himself) a film genealogy, in which

Robert Bresson plays an important part. The idea was to do for a musical text what Bresson had done in *The Diary of a Country Priest* (released in 1951) for a literary text, that of Bernanos. The music was to appear in the film as a material, respected as such, not used as “film music”, but offered to a specific listening experience by the means of cinema.

In fact, Huillet and Straub always willingly accepted the idea of a closeness between cinema and music—“For us it’s an old story,” Straub said. “Film seems to be the art of space. In reality, it’s the art of time. We work with spatial blocks to create a temporal reality. And the art that works the most with time is music³.”—, whereas the parallel with painting appeared to them, in spite of the lessons of Cézanne or Giotto, as an imposture. This proximity with music has informed their work like few other filmmakers—*Moses und Aron*’s editing for instance was aligned with the opera’s score—, and has been recognized by musicians themselves. Karlheinz Stockhausen has written one of the most beautiful and sharpest commentaries on their first film, *Machorka-Muff*, as soon as it was released in 1962. The German composer, then 34 years old and active since the beginning of the 1950s, emphasized the quality of “the composition of time, which is—as it is to music—particular to film”: “You have achieved good proportions in the duration of scenes, between those which almost stand still—how astonishing is the courage to be still, to a slow tempo, in such a relatively short film!—and extremely fast events [...] Furthermore, the relative density of the changes in the varied tempos is good. [...] And in addition, this ‘unrealistic’ condensation in time, without being rushed⁴.” These words could easily apply to Huillet and Straub’s later work, and would even reveal rarely seen features: quickness, density of tempo changes, condensation, are important functions in the editing and the global form of *Chronik*.

With Bach, against Bach

Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet’s encounter with Bach, whose importance in their work until at least *Operai, contadini* (2001) cannot be overestimated, seems to have happened in phases.

The discovery first came through another certainly founding encounter, Straub’s friend François Louis, a mathematician by profession and an amateur pianist, organist and composer. Louis in fact played a part in the elaboration of the music of the two films whose shooting preceded *Chronik, Machorka-Muff* (1962) and *Nicht Versöhnt* (1965),

each of which features a Bach piece, beside a Bartók one in the second film, and one of Louis' own compositions in the first, *Transmutations* (1957), played by its author on the organ.

The second moment of the encounter takes place through another mediation: a record, that of a Bach performance by Gustav Leonhardt, then still little known, that struck them as lightning. As told later by Danièle Huillet, "We immediately said to ourselves: 'We want *him*^{5!}'" The fact that the encounter with Leonhardt happened through recorded music is rather interesting. The immediate and irrevocable choice of the Dutch organist and harpsichordist to "embody" Bach wasn't made after an interview in the flesh, a "screen test" nor even after having seen a concert; it was made entirely with the ears and without the eyes, from a recording inscribed on the physical medium of vinyl. As though listening—and listening again—to this music through a reproduction had participated to confirm the idea that its performer would be ideal for its recording on film.

The "second phase" of the record medium, the restitution of a previous archiving, of a performance that has already taken place, makes a musical piece come back from a past, not only in its structure—the score—but also in the very form of its execution. The disc makes the music *heard again*. This echoes of course the very idea of *Chronik*, but also Leonhardt's musical approach. To hear Bach anew, as he has to be heard but has not been for such a long time. To understand for the first time perhaps, in the present historical moment, what "hearing Bach" can mean. This "second phase" defines quite well Leonhardt and his peers' position in the musical field. For the matter was not for them to perform Bach on period instruments *as though nothing had happened in-between*, but to do it *against all that had been done since*. Against Karajan, or against Gould. That may also be what Huillet and Straub heard in that Leonhardt recording, in the middle of the 1950s—something echoing the Charles Péguy quote inscribed at the beginning of the published script of *Chronik*: "Faire la révolution c'est aussi remettre en place des choses très anciennes mais oubliées." ("Making the revolution is also putting back in place very ancient but forgotten things.")

This "against", this opposition or this hate, are also political and historical. Becoming attached to Bach is far from being obvious for a filmmaker of Straub and Huillet's generation. The French "New Wave" and the young women and men linked to the new cinema in the world rather turned—when they were interested in music at all—to jazz,

rock or pop song (J.-L. Godard, Gilles Groulx, Jerzy Skolimowski), traditional popular music (Glauber Rocha, Pierre Perrault), or even, in some particular cases (J. Rivette, A. Resnais) certain forms of modern composition. Putting forward the figure of Bach—and the way they did it—implies that the filmmakers take a certain position within the culture of their time—as they will again later with Corneille for French culture, or Hölderlin for the German one. In the text “the Bachfilm”, edited from a 1966 interview with Enno Patalas, Jean-Marie Straub expanded on that “against”: “The film will really be the contrary of what I read yesterday on a board of the Theatiner Filmkunst about the film on Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and which I noted down: ‘His and his father’s music give to the film a wealth of impressive musical summits.’ My greatest fear with the ‘Bachfilm’ until now was precisely that the music should create summits in the film: it must remain at the same level as the rest⁶.” The film evoked here is exemplary of the problem, and the anecdote builds a direct link between *Chronik* and the Straubs’ deep political anger during these 1960s: *Friedemann Bach* is a nazi propaganda film directed by Traugott Müller in 1941. Shown then in the Hitlerian Youth circles, it was still projected after the war and, as Straub witnesses here, still in 1966, as if this biography of Bach’s oldest son as a morally “degenerate” artist as opposed to his father’s all positive authority could have no relation to its production context. *Friedemann Bach* becomes another example, for Straub, of Germany’s recklessness and of the deep continuity between post-war Germany and the third Reich, already denounced by the two previous films. Today, *Friedemann Bach* is available on dvd in Germany, published in 2005 in a collection entitled “Die grossen deutschen Film-Klassiker”, *the great German film classics*. For Straub then, it’s in the very form of the film, in the way the music is to be shown, that a radical opposition between *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* and *Friedemann Bach* is to be inscribed, an opposition that is to reverse the spectator’s relation to images and sounds, an opposition that must turn the post-romantic—according to Straub—nazi vision of Bach into something else entirely.

Straub and Huillet have had several times to answer the question “Why Bach?” Several reasons have been invoked, intersecting each other. One has to do particularly with Western history and the place of Germany: according to Straub, Bach “represents the end of a certain western Christian civilization. With his death, in 1750, another era begins.” Getting back to Bach is getting back to the moment before, the moment preceding the catastrophe. After Bach’s death comes for Huillet and Straub Romanticism

in its worse sense, the worship of the eternal and timeless Genius, of the Pure Spirit—but, will they recall after the shooting of *Klassenverhältnisse* (1984): “einfach mit der Seele, das gibt es nicht:” “only with the soul, that doesn’t exist.” Straub again: “Bach is for me one of the last characters in German culture in whom there is still no divorce between what one calls artist and intellectual; no trace can be found in him of Romanticism—everyone knows what came partly out of German Romanticism.” Later, Huillet and Straub will give to Hölderlin the place of the very last in this history, of the one who arrives after, too late, of the one whose intimate and political tragedy lies precisely in trying, from what is already Romanticism, to revive this moment before the divorce—in vain.

The hatred of Herbert von Karajan that Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub share with Gustav Leonhardt is no coincidence: it is not only on a personal and trivial level that Karajan compromised himself with the Nazis, not only because his authoritarian personality or his immoderate love of fame and glory would have lead him to that. It is the whole of his conception of music and of the musical work that for the Straubs is the mark of a culture of which Nazism is only the worst incarnation. This culture emerges in 1750, and the “Bach moment” was full of entirely other potentialities, that got forgotten. From this perspective, as Straub suggested in the documentary made on the film during the shooting⁷, it cannot be considered neutral for the filmmakers that the actor embodying Bach was not German, but Dutch.

The figure and the art of Bach have in fact, at a certain moment, appeared as exemplary for leftist artists concerned with the question of form. For Straub, Bach has to do with Brecht:

“Bach is of interest to us for the same reasons that he was of interest to Brecht. Brecht said: ‘Good music must not raise the listener’s temperature.’ He found in Bach his almost ideal music, a music that always leaves the listener, the spectator, cold and free to follow a line of thought, to use his head to follow lines that go on or break off: a dialectical musical fabric⁸.”

In another context, the leftist American poet Louis Zukofsky had begun the long poem it took his life to write, “A” (1928-1974), with the performance of the *Matthew Passion* in Carnegie Hall in 1928. The poem then unrolls in twenty-four movements according to a model explicitly taken from Bach, and particularly the fugue form. The twelfth movement, written in 1950-1951, is a 140-page poetic transcription of a fugue,

intermingling thematic lines on the fundamental B-A-C-H motif. There, Zukofsky quotes Bach: “The parts of a fugue should behave like reasonable men / in an orderly discussion”. This for him too was deeply political. He had written sixteen years earlier: “Our world will not stand it, / the implications of a too regular form.” The violinist Paul Zukofsky, son of the poet, recorded in 1971-72 a particularly violent and beautiful version of Bach’s three sonatas and partitas for solo violin.

There are consequently several ways in which Bach, at that time, was deeply political for Huillet and Straub, and several ways in which these politics had to be inscribed in the very form of the film.

Words and images

So the birth of the idea of *Chronik* is for Jean-Marie Straub exactly contemporaneous with the birth of the Algerian revolution: November 1954. But this first project of very young persons doesn’t take immediately its definitive form. Some things seem to have been there from the beginning or almost: direct sound, period costumes—already things with complex consequences. Straub related the evolution of the project to *Filmkritik* in 1968:

“First there were only images or scenes, or an action, as you wish to call it. There were only things like a picnic by the Bach family—part of the family was seen on the grass. They were long scenes, with many shots. The text came over gradually. First came texts by me, with my words, in my German. I then replaced them by period words. I was always only happy when I was certain there wasn’t any word left that wasn’t said at the time. For instance I found only late: ‘...raubte uns der Tod bald...’ (‘...death soon stole from us...’), and then the names. That I found only late, in a cantata by Bach himself. Before there was probably a bad sentence by me⁹.”

This constitutes already an important difference in methods with the following films, and a moment of initiation: here, the starting point is not an existing text, which has to be edited and rearranged through a montage process. The starting point is a more abstract plan, with less material delimitations, an aggregate of images, gestures, movements and durations... Only through the research, through the joint progress of the work on matter and of the construction of the idea, does the film’s objectification process occur. It is with this process that the erasure principle appears that will remain afterwards the heart of Huillet and Straub’s method. If later they will start at the outset

with words written by others, here they will have to take out their own words sentence by sentence, and replace them patiently with the language of the time—Bach’s language, or the collective language of a precise moment, historically and geographically determined.

These transformations of the initial form can have been progressive; they can also have appeared as sudden reversals. “One day I gave the script to read to [Alexandre] Astruc”, Straub kept on. “He was enthusiastic and said he wanted to do on the same mode a film on Luther. After that I destroyed it all. But part of it is still in the film. I know that the picnic and these things are still there, and I hope one feels them.”

Straub also told he had gone to Robert Bresson’s, to propose him to direct the film from the script. To which proposition Bresson answered: you must do it yourself. So that, as Straub said, Bresson almost forced him to become a filmmaker...

Cinematic work thus proceeds in superimposed layers, to form a palimpsest that lets one see—that cannot but let one see (a Straubian premise)—the history it is made of. The final material object is never entirely opaque: it exists, solid, but marked by a certain transparency through which can be seen or sensed the process it is the result of. This conception lies at the heart of *Chronik* as it became, and of all the other films. If the matter is showing the work required by the performance of a score, this doesn’t imply for the Straubs to show the musicians’ successive mistakes, inaccuracies, blunders, errors. This is useless (and not very nice): showing the work is showing the worker who has succeeded and can be proud of what he has achieved. The difficulties, the missteps that had to be made and overcome, will be visible anyway, through this kind of transparency of the object to the process that has produced it and that it embodies.

Thus the long preparatory work for *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* is the moment when the principles and the methods of the Straubian art find their concrete coherence.

Film, music

The project has also deeply evolved on the question of music. “There has always been music, and also the related chronology,” Straub went on. But at the beginning, “almost no music was shown while it was performed.” The erasure of Straub’s words goes along with the gradual erasure of the anecdote, of the plot, perhaps of the action, even though that is debatable (action there remains!). From a Bach biography, the film transformed itself little by little into the representation of the musician’s work and its evolution,

finally, as Straub said at the time, into a documentary on Gustav Leonhardt.

Nevertheless, the portrait of the artist Johann Sebastian Bach hasn't disappeared. First because the patient reconstruction of his scores and of his way of producing music constitutes in itself a portrait. Second because the spectator of *Chronik* learns a lot about the circumstances in which he could work, about his role, his function, his status: commissions, power relations, financial problems, etc. And also because parallel to, or mostly through, the music itself, appears the image of a loving family, and of a couple in love—all the more movingly that the image remains devoid of all sentimentalism. The beginning of the third reel for instance transforms Bach's reading of a letter of material claims to his authorities into an authentic declaration of love, by the simple means of two shots on Anna Magdalena listening a long time, and then, as she moves to sit down by the window beside her beloved, passing briefly her hand on his shoulders.

The whole of the first reel is, as exemplarily as discreetly, constructed to give at the outset an image of the strength and nature of love for Bach and his friends, relatives, and contemporaries. The reel is framed by the two musical performances gathering Bach and the "gracious prince loving as much as knowing music beside whom he thought he could end his life," the prince of Anhalt-Cöthen, played by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, then already a frequent partner of Leonhardt. The friendship and esteem between the two men, and Bach's disappointment in front of the prince's turning away from music in favour of his new wife, show through the simple contrast between the visible musical complicity, and the facts stated by Anna Magdalena, who yet says nothing of her husband's feelings. Between these two scenes, Anna Magdalena is seen first in a very brief close up, and next playing on the family spinet a minuet composed by her husband; then one can see the two oldest children from the preceding marriage—Wilhelm Friedemann, eleven years old, performing a score written for him by his father and that will become the "Well-Tempered Clavier", and Catharina Dorothea, thirteen, she and her father curtseying and bowing after having danced together the minuet played by the daughter's new mother-in-law.

Thus, this more than eight-minute passage constituted solely of musical performances of Bach pieces and of shots on score title pages, excepting two shots of respectively one second (Anna Magdalena sitting, watching out of field, on the second shot of the film) and four seconds (the curtsey), indirectly reveals entirely different matters. Making music together, writing music for someone, playing someone's music: here work

crystallizes the circulation of love. Through ellipses, through the structure and rhythm of the editing, this passage tells the games of work and friendship, the affection of a father for his children, the place of the boy and that of the girl, the arrival of a young mother-in-law in a family whose history is already long, and the intensity of feeling in the gifts of music.

This can be seen as what remains, in the film's holes or margins, of the family picnic that was reminiscent of Renoir's *Partie de campagne*—a picnic erased by Straub in a gesture that may have been enraged, but a picnic whose tone of sensual elegy for a loving family and couple remains at the deepest of the film, structuring it and allowing its surface violence, a political violence.

Itinerary, lessons

But let's get back again to the beginnings of the project, in the middle of the 1950s. The foreseen form evolves according to the idea's own life ("You cannot expect the Form before the Idea, for they will come into being together," as Straub often quotes from Schoenberg's Aaron), but also, as I mentioned, to the advance of the researches. The crucial discovery of Leonhardt's recordings leads the filmmakers to ask him to participate to the film:

"We learned he lived in Amsterdam and we took the train to see him. He asked us for a little time to think, it was the middle of winter, we spent a few days on the Texel island, and as we came back he answered: 'I'll do it.' It was in 1957¹⁰."

The musician's acceptance makes the project possible and coherent. Ten more years will be needed to have the film see the light of day. In the meantime, various minor or major events will have an influence on its development. In 1957 was republished in Germany and in France a book which was a kind of sensation at the time of its first anonymous edition in 1925 in English and 1930 in German: Esther Meynell's *Little Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. The link between this fake diary and the Straubs' film is minimal, but it may have been the source of a few ideas.

The future of the film is also altered by an event coming from an entirely other field, returning in Jean-Marie Straub's life after the initial coincidence of November 1954: in 1958, he was enlisted in the French army, to fight in Algeria. He decided not to show up: he had to leave France for Amsterdam and then Germany, where he was met by Danièle Huillet. He is condemned to prison *in absentia*. The results were, as Straub wrote in

2003, “eleven years of exile in Munich for having refused enlistment to Algeria and with it ‘institutionalised’ torture¹¹.” In 1969, they left Germany for Rome; Straub was amnestied in 1971, and they shot their first film on French soil, precisely on the Communards’ hill of the Père Lachaise cemetery, in May 1977: *Toute révolution est un coup de dés*, from Mallarmé.

From 1958 on, Straub and Huillet have “travelled two years long searching for materials for the film on Bach¹²,” searching for texts, scores, information, but also places, instruments (organs mainly), etc.

Then came the cinematic experiences: the preparation and the ten days shooting, in September 1962, of *Machorka-Muff*, shown at the Oberhausen Festival in February 1963, taken from a 1958 short story by Heinrich Böll. Then followed *Nicht Versöhnt*, from a 1959 Böll novel. The project this time is of greater scope: the shooting lasted six weeks at the end of the summer of 1964, and two more weeks in the spring of 1965. The film was shown in various festivals as soon as July 1965. So things were speeding up.

The concrete experience of cinema, the confrontation not so much with the ‘real’ as with the dominant rules of the film world, also entailed the first lessons, some of a major importance for the rest of their work and particularly for *Chronik*. Huillet and Straub didn’t learn the necessity of compromise, but the necessity of sticking to the idea and the principles, the absurdity of compromise. The way Straub tells it, the lesson concerned first what they had always believed in: direct sound. *Machorka-Muff* was shot in 35mm and in direct sound “except for the streets in Bonn,” Straub stated in 1969. “That was the reason I swore never to film silent again, unless it was a film that would demand it. This decision dates from this time, when I let myself be persuaded by [producer Walter] Krüttner that it would be cheaper and would go quicker and only in the street in Bonn... shooting silent. And I did it and then afterwards I regretted it because the I had to go down in Bonn when the fine cut was ready, and on every spot where the camera had been, I held up a microphone to record the noises and I found out how annoying it is to post-synchronise a film and just how meaningless it is. [...] At that time they also wrote in *Der Spiegel* that I would go into film history because I had gone to Bonn to record the tramways, they should be the same in Munich or anywhere. But that isn’t true, the sound is very different. First they aren’t the same kind of cars and carriages, and the sound on a corner in Bonn is not all the same as on a corner in Munich¹³.”

Two or three things to be remembered: for instance, that post-synchronizing can

probably be cheaper and faster, if one is not still deeply attached to original sound, to the link between a precise sound and the thing that produced it, and the place where it was produced, and the action of which it results. Or that an argument uttered by someone who can't make the difference between the sounds of two dissimilar tramways cannot be a good argument. Huillet and Straub would stick to direct sound from then on. And of course, for a project like *Chronik*, it is of considerable, crucial importance, all the more so that musical performance takes more and more place in the film.

War and peace

But the thirteen years separating the birth of the project and its realization are not for Huillet and Straub the peaceful time of the maturation of the idea. They are the time of the conflicts, of the refusals, of the laborious and painful apprenticeship of relentlessness. Nobody seems to want to finance *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. In any case, not the film that Huillet and Straub have in mind. A Bach biography, why not? Anna Magdalena's point of view, why not? But not this film, not this way.

Two opportunities have emerged to make a *Chronik* before 1967, without having to wait. But each time, a condition is set, which is an unacceptable condition. *Chronik* is to be a rather expensive film: quite many characters, numerous settings in various places across Germany, period costumes, wigs, instruments, etc. As a consequence, a producer will try to ensure a proper return on investments, and Mr Gustav Leonhardt ("who's that again?" as Straub summed up the reactions of the time) does not constitute that guarantee. Huillet and Straub have been proposed money for the film under the condition that they choose another main actor, a "star." "We could have done it ten years earlier with Curd Jürgens¹⁴!" The other option was not an actor but a musician: Hanns Eckelkamp, director of the important "art films" production company Atlas, had accepted to participate to the 'Bachfilm' in the form of a distribution guarantee, offering even twice the money needed, if they accepted to choose... Karajan, instead of Leonhardt! "I said that was out of the question—I knew exactly whom I wanted for the principal character, and Karajan doesn't play the harpsichord¹⁵."

A film is a system. At a certain point, compromise becomes impossible, because it is incompatible with the way the whole object works, with the matter and with the idea, with the aim and with the method that will make it possible to reach the aim. Leonhardt is the only option because Huillet and Straub admire his work and his conception of

Bach's music. He is the only option also because the film will be, that is for sure, in direct sound. As a consequence, the person who will "play" Bach must be able to play his music, and in a coherent way. All the actors who will need to perform musical pieces on screen have in fact to be musicians. Actors they will be *de facto*, or as a consequence. Jürgens is simply irrelevant, and all things considered Karajan too—even excluding all ideological factors, if that is possible.

Direct sound is not an abstract principle for Huillet and Straub. Their concern for the precise sound produced by a given event is for them inseparable from a concern for the precise, concrete gesture, thick with real history, born out of a confrontation with matter. The Straubian actor does not simulate. Imitating, pretending, do not belong to his/her vocabulary—even in fiction, that doesn't make any difference. Making a gesture is too important a thing: the gesture has to be heavy with all that gives it its meaning and form, its individual and collective past. *Chronik* is a search for gestures that are not authentic, original, auratic, but heavy with their past confrontations with musical matter. Huillet and Straub recognized in Leonhardt this same search for the precise gesture demanded by the score and the history of musical techniques: to them he was the guarantee that this search would be inscribed on the screen through a collective work. Confronting musicians with a natural trumpet—without valves—in 1967 is not to be understood as a quest for a pure historicist authenticity, but as a way to meet "very ancient but forgotten" methods, through which a new weight can be given to the act of playing. Jean Dubuffet had written in 1946 in *Notes pour les fins lettrés*: "Art must be born from the material and the tool and must keep trace of the tool and of the struggle of the tool with the material. Man must speak but the tool also and the material also."

That concern for sound as much as musical form, for the instrument as much as the pure virtuosity of the performer, for the tool and the material as much as the person, is what connects Huillet and Straub with some of the most lively and crucial areas of contemporary music.

Until the very end, the *Chronik* project was in danger. "Three days before shooting started we still hadn't got the money¹⁶." It took a personal risk-taking, a hesitant commitment of the Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, and finally a last minute financial help from Jean-Luc Godard, for the whole not to finally collapse just before its realization.

This long, endless struggle for the possibility to let this single film, *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*, see the light of day was certainly for Huillet and Straub a founding, crucial experience. It is the reason why Straub dedicated the film to the North Vietnamese during a 1968 projection in Munich: “We never said it was a contribution to their struggle. Only that the film was dedicated to the Vietcong. And we added that we hoped the Vietcong would not have to struggle on for ten more years against American imperialism, the way we had to struggle for ten years for this film to finance it¹⁷.”

The importance of that experience can be sensed again in these words Straub pronounced as late as 1993: “[...] the class struggle, it’s not in Karl Marx that we discovered it, but through the obstacles that we have met when we tried to make a precise film that was *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. It lasted from 1958 to 1967, so ten years. It’s there that we realized what were social violence, class struggle, etc. Reading Marx after that, we said to ourselves: ‘Now, that is a perfectly clear, true and realistic analysis of a state of things¹⁸.’”

Wanting to make a *precise* film is already probably what the film industry could not easily accept.

Bach and his amateurs, the 1950s

The importance of *Chronik* has to be measured not only in the framework of Huillet and Straub’s work, but also within the wider history of musical practices.

Theodor W. Adorno’s essay “Bach defended against his devotees,” published in *Merkur* in 1951, gives a good idea of the role played by Bach’s figure in German post-war culture, and of its complex relationship with a certain progressive musical world. Adorno denounces the way expert devotees claim exclusive rights to the composer, typecasting him in a historicist, in fact reactionary vision. “Bach is degraded by impotent nostalgia to the very church composer against whose office his music rebelled and which he filled only with great conflict¹⁹.” He then insists on the historical gap between Bach’s compositional techniques and his time, on the composer’s “archaism”, for which historicism cannot account and which finally makes his music “modern precisely in the sense of that nervous sensibility which Historicism would like to exorcise²⁰.” This modernity, the music’s fertility for 20th century composers—Adorno mentions Schoenberg and Webern—, is what counts, when its historical reality is radically beyond reach: “Perhaps the traditional Bach can indeed no longer be interpreted. If this is true,

his heritage has passed on to composition, which is loyal to him in being disloyal; it calls his music by name in producing it anew²¹.”

The *Chronik* project finds its coherence in a blind spot in Adorno’s text. The film seems to turn historicism against itself: Huillet and Straub are not searching for a pure historical authenticity marked by the approval of expert scholars, and praising the greatness of a Bach represented as an ahistorical authority. On the contrary, they keep insisting, precisely through the accuracy of historical research, on the conflicts that Bach’s duties of office provoked, complicating his life and his task, but also structuring his music. Bach appears in *Chronik* as a composer of secular as much as of sacred music, but moreover, Huillet and Straub instil dialectics in the distinction taken over by Adorno. In the Straubs’ films, *Chronik* but also the later ones, as early as *Der Bräutigam, die Komödiantin und der Zuhälter* (1968), sacred music is charged with a renovating power, a properly revolutionary violence. *Chronik*—like the other early project *Moses und Aron*—can be read as a “theological-political fragment,” to quote Walter Benjamin’s title. The palpable presence of death in the Bachfilm is a tension towards an *after*, towards the divine of the messianic return, the content of which becomes each time, through the structure of the film, absolutely political. The text of cantata BWV 205 for instance, “Aeolus Appeased,” is heard concretely for the violence it proclaims: “How merrily I will laugh / When all is upside down! / When even rock stands unsafe, / And when roofs collapse, / Then merrily I will laugh!”

“Nervous sensibility” defines rather well Leonhardt’s touch and his understanding of Bach’s style, even though his discourse insists on a literal, “expert” reading of the original score. Letting Bach be heard as close as possible to the way it was at the time is not cutting him away from the history that leads to Schoenberg. On the contrary, it is the only way for Schoenberg’s contemporaries to get a chance to hear Bach anew, by creating a time-lag with the later layers of the “traditional Bach,” who may have become impossible to interpret but certainly is impossible to hear today, having been heard too much, too often, for too long. Huillet, Straub and Leonhardt’s Bach, wearing wigs and playing on period instruments, really defends himself against his devotees.

Selling Leonhardt

Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet have often insisted on that point which had created numerous difficulties: at the time of *Chronik*, Gustav Leonhardt was almost

unknown. “Everybody told us, even musicologists, not only the cheap people of the film industry: ‘who’s that again?’ He had no market value²².” Actually, the very idea of performing baroque music on period instruments remained limited to a narrow audience at the time, confined to the circles of “experts” of the specific area. This practice had no cultural status, being of any interest only to some music historians and not to the wider audience of “amateurs.” In fact, *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* largely helped give a new status to that kind of performance—as though, in 1968, it was not film which needed art for legitimation, but “art” film which seemed capable of giving a cultural weight to an artistic practice that should need no legitimation (ancient music).

Still, Leonhardt had already recorded a few discs at the time. Musicians interested in baroque music playing on period instruments then made up a very small group, many of whom finally got involved in *Chronik*: Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who had created the Concentus Musicus Wien with this wife in 1953, played the viola da gamba in the film under the wig of the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen, accompanied by his ensemble; and August Wenzinger’s Konzertgruppe of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis acted as the Leipzig churches orchestra.

Leonhardt had released some solo recordings as early as the very beginning of the 1950s, first on the organ—the Klosterneuburg recital in 1950, his first disc, on Vanguard, followed in 1951 by the Frescobaldi recital on the organ of the Hofkirche, Innsbruck, and on the harpsichord. Then came *The Art of the Fugue*, recorded on the harpsichord in May 1953, still for Vanguard, in relation with the publication in 1952 of his ground-breaking essay *The Art of the Fugue; Bach's Last Harpsichord Work: An Argument*²³. This important and openly controversial book consisted of a patient and systematic refutation of the theretofore accepted judgements on the *Art of the Fugue*, through a precise study of the score, of its concrete technical implications for the performer, and of historical documents. He thus came to the conclusions that the *Art of the Fugue* is not an unfinished work; that it was not written for ensemble, but for harpsichord; etc. An “expert’s” musicological and historical work, it still does not remain only theoretical and abstract, as it entails a radical renewal of the relation to the work that is immediately perceptible by the listener of the recording. The essay and the recording are important for the *Chronik* project: the filmmakers had heard the recording at the time, and Danièle Huillet had entirely translated the book in French, a translation whose manuscript seems to have been lost.

Leonhardt's text and interpretation perfectly demonstrate the depth of the transformations of musical practice—and consequently of listening—that have been brought up by the performance of early music on period instruments. In the Straubs' understanding of the phenomenon, this approach is not historicist, but materialist: it takes things back from the concrete traces, texts, period apparatuses, the tool and the material. It is also, and that is important for them, based on modesty (modesty has always been praised by Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet as a crucial political and artistic virtue—the quality that makes the greatness of Cézanne or Peter Nestler): the main problem of the musician is not interpretation anymore, is not adding a layer of subjectivity, being disloyal to the work to supposedly remain more loyal to its idea. On the contrary, the matter now is to step aside and leave the text by itself, to search for objectivity, to consider the act of performing not as the expression of the musician's subjectivity, but as an attempt at understanding the musical object. The matter now is to allow not oneself, but Bach to be heard. A strange idea. A “dry,” “austere,” “intellectual” undertaking... Reading the Adorno essay gives a good idea of the complete misunderstanding such an approach can arouse, even for such a mind as the author of the *Aesthetic Theory* and *Minima Moralia*.

Still in 1953, Leonhardt recorded the *Goldberg Variations* on the harpsichord, and in 1954, Vanguard released the *Cantata BWV 170 & 54*, with the Leonhardt Baroque Ensemble, Alfred Deller singing and Harnoncourt playing the baroque cello; then an anthology of Elizabethan and Jacobian music, with Deller and Harnoncourt again, and another gathering the Deller Consort and the Leonhardt Consort.

As for Harnoncourt, he had participated, on the viola da gamba, to the recording of the *Brandenburg Concertos* on period instruments in 1954, concertos that he recorded again in 1957, and which were also put on record in 1954 as conducted by August Wenzinger with the Konzertgrupper of the Schola Cantorum. These concertos had then become a landmark in the history of performance on ancient instruments—which is echoed in the Straubs' decision to have the first allegro of the fifth concerto, in the *Concentus Musicus'* interpretation, played as the overture of *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*.

So when the *Chronik* project is conceived, early music performance on ancient instruments is beginning to have a perceptible, if limited, discography. It will develop in the following years—by the time *Chronik* is shot, Harnoncourt's recorded output amounts to about thirty LPs. The recurrence of the same names in these recordings

demonstrates the existence of an international (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) but still marginal community, each of its members knowing the others, and bound to work with them at one time or another. *Chronik* will give this community a greater coherence, and a wider visibility.

Film music

For all the musicians engaged, as well as for the sound engineers, the film constituted a singular experience, and an experiment. Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet wanted to present the widest possible span of musical configurations: solo organ and harpsichord, but also chamber orchestras and large ensembles with choirs, cantatas and instrumental pieces, etc. Some of these configurations had never been tried on ancient instruments, and required historical and musical research, looking for instruments and musicians that could play them, trying to reconstruct old musical techniques... These ensembles were moreover confronted with architectural constraints: they were asked to play not in studios or concert halls, but in period rooms of ancient houses or narrow organ lofts, each imposing a specific acoustics, as well as a different spatial arrangement of the musicians, altering the way each would hear the others and even himself.

Furthermore, Leonhardt had never conducted an orchestra, and the majority of musicians were not familiar with ancient instruments and techniques: shoulderless violins played standing, valveless natural trumpets of which Straub had been told no-one could play today, etc.

To these circumstances must be added the specific implications of Huillet and Straub's visual and sound practice. As was already mentioned, the filmmakers record everything in direct sound; but two complementary technical choices had important consequences. First, musical performances were to be filmed in one shot. While working on the script, Straub had imagined a few exceptions, for instance the performance of the chorus of the *Matthew Passion* overture, but all will finally disappear: each piece is filmed and recorded continuously. But this practice is not common in the record industry, recordings with ancient instruments having been specifically reproached with relying too heavily on editing: the difficulty of obtaining just sounds on reluctant instruments was compensated by a mixing of different takes. The technique adopted by Huillet and Straub prevents this possibility. The trumpet player Edward H. Tarr, a pioneer of baroque interpretation on his instrument, told Kailan R. Rubinoff in 2009:

“...I can tell you that the entire recording situation was nerve-racking, since Straub didn’t believe in splicing... and insisted that if there were any mistakes, we had to go back to the beginning of a given number. We began that cantata [BWV 215] chorus over 20 times! Either somebody, including us trumpeters, made a ‘clam’, or still more often the chorus got out of tune. It did not help us psychologically to know that this was the last work that Gottfried Reiche played, for he collapsed in the street and died the following day back in 1734²⁴...”

Twenty takes remains apparently a quite exceptional situation for *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. The longest shot is number 42 (in published scripts), showing the performance of the *Saint Matthew Passion* opening chorus, where Leonhardt conducts sixty-three musicians for seven and a half minutes. The eighth take was finally chosen—Danièle Huillet: “curiously, for that eighth take, the attack was not perfect, they were not together [...] and in the end it was the most beautiful²⁵.” But Tarr’s story is all the more interesting that this BWV 215 cantata happens to be played *out of field*, only Leonhardt, playing the harpsichord and conducting, being visible on screen—this is shot 57 of the script, on Leipzig’s marketplace at night, lit by wax torches, the only shot of the film built on “special effects” (the setting being a transparency projection behind Leonhardt, with a violent incoherence of perspective). The direct sound principle could be considered there as not that crucial: one could have thought of keeping Leonhardt’s gestures on screen and add a separately recorded music—were it not for the sound of the harpsichord, and the precision of the gestures in relation to the music²⁶... Huillet and Straub refused this solution, whatever the difficulties and their financial consequences. Tarr’s narrative also shows that the film context interacted with the musicians on a deeper level than one could think: even here, out of field, the musician playing Gottfried Reiche’s part, Bach’s principal trumpeter, felt invested with his role, and with the fictional situation represented by the shot: the performance for the prince August III of Sax in Leipzig, on October 5, 1734, the day after which, according to some versions, Reiche would have known a sudden death, exhausted by the difficulty of his task...

Mono

The other technical constraint with important consequences on the performances but also on the reception of *Chronik* was the monophonic sound, and the use of as small a number of microphones as was possible. Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub never

abandoned mono. The reasons are many, and some of them probably of taste. They disliked stereo even for records: “In 1959, in Munich [so five years after the beginning of the work on what will become *Chronik*], Danièle’s mother had offered us an amplifier and a turntable as a wedding gift. But we wanted only one loudspeaker. The salesman wanted to palm two of them off on us, already at that time²⁷.”

In the framework of cinema, monophonic sound bears a symmetry with direct sound, in that it physically links the sound with the image from the point of view of the receiver, in the projection room. In classical mono diffusion, the loudspeaker was situated behind the perforated screen: the sound came out of the image. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, monophonic sound recording enables to produce a clear sound perspective. Stereophony would destroy then artificially reconstruct a perspective based not on the listener’s real relation to space, but on a comfortable distribution of the sources in an abstract space. Mono is in fact the only way to respect the original space in which the sound was produced, and to give the listener a presence in this space, a material and concrete listening point, a place. As a consequence, as Straub told, “from the first meeting with Wenzinger, Leonhardt and [sound engineer Louis] Hocht—our old accomplice—, we have set a general principle: one microphone per performance²⁸.” This principle can admit exceptions, but they are rare and cautious—“We could go up to three for the opening chorus of the *Saint Matthew*, but certainly not four.” Three microphones for one track on the mono Nagra, this implied that Louis Hocht would mix live, during the take. “No making up for anything.” Of course, in such a context, the constraints on sound recording are very important. “The great concern for Leonhardt was balance. The balance between choir and orchestra. Balance, in baroque music even more than elsewhere, has to be impeccable²⁹.” A perfect balance between elements recorded live with a single microphone implies a careful choice of the microphone (Neumann in this case), of its position and orientation in the physical space of the performance in relation to the musicians and the camera, of the arrangement of the musicians in space, and of the architecture of the place itself (Straub: “From the beginning, Harnoncourt had warned us: ‘Baroque music is music that needs the acoustics of marble-covered places³⁰.’”)

The sound and musical matter of the film is deeply structured by these choices, and *Chronik* has been attacked by several “amateurs” for having made the music inaudible. Let us take the example given by Straub, the opening chorus of the *Saint Matthew*

Passion, performed in the choirloft parapet of the St-Wilhadi church in Stade. The chorus is sung by two choirs, each at one end of the parapet. Between them stand the two orchestras, and in the middle of the loft the organ player, the seven sopranos, and Bach/Leonhardt conducting the ensemble. As for the camera, it stands at the left end of the parapet, right behind the first choir. Consequently, the first choir is heard very close, and the second much further away. On records, at that time already, stereo is used to isolate each choir on one channel, each being thus specifically “spatialized” in the listener’s abstract space, while respecting an “ideal” neutral balance between the two groups of voices. For the spectator of *Chronik*, a very different dynamism is given to the exchange through the physical position of the observer/listener: intensities, timbres, the clarity of the voices, are completely dissimilar from one choir to the other. As a result, this dialogue between the daughter of Zion (the first choir, close to us) and the Faithful (the second, far away) comes to take a new meaning, being heard another way, by us, here, now, in a singular performance and listening situation. This situation is determined by the material conditions of image and sound recording, but also by the global film structure: the chorus is heard at the end of the second reel of the film *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*. This 7’24” shot is situated between the performance by Anna Magdalena, her husband and three musicians of the Funeral Music BWV 244a, which will then be integrated by Bach to the *Saint Matthew Passion*, and a seven second shot on a seaside, dark pebbles and small waves, a rising sun hardly seen on the horizon: the last notes die there, followed by silence.

The arrangement of a musical performance with a place and a viewing and listening point, as it is here realized, is a consequence of the cinematic apparatus, and of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub’s practices and conceptions. It differentiates the perception of music in *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* from any other experience of the music, be it concert or record. Through the film, the music is produced differently, recorded from different technical and ideological (political) principles, and heard in different conditions. It is this arrangement that gave *Chronik* a singular place in the history of film practices and (consequently) forms, as well as in the history of musical practices and forms, regarding whether performance or recording techniques. If the invention of *Chronik* constitutes a fundamental moment for Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub’s work, it is because this particular film, because of its object, created a series of precise problems, which required a coherent constellation of solutions—and

constructed the coherence of these solutions into a constellation that formed the basis of their work. In a kind of Bazinian logic, it is because these film techniques were conceived from musical objects that they changed the cinema, and it is because these musical techniques were conceived for film that they transformed music.

Chroniks

The film *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach* was finally shot from August 20 to October 14, 1967. Editing was through before Christmas. The first print was ready in January 1968. The film was projected for the first time on February 3, at the Cinemanifestate Festival, in Utrecht, then that same year at the Critics Week in Cannes, at the Filmfestspiele in Berlin, at the London Film Festival, and a few other festivals.

During the following months, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet made “dubbed” versions of *Chronik*, something which would remain rather exceptional in their work. Huillet and Straub are very probably the most violent and fiercest enemies of dubbing that ever walked our Earth; but *Chronik*, as, for the only other example, *Too Early/Too Late*³¹, can be an exception. Anna Magdalena is never seen speaking (or singing) on screen; yet, her voice is omnipresent through the commentary. It becomes thus possible to have the commentary said by someone else than the woman we see, in another language than German. But dialogues and filmed texts will be subtitled. The filmmakers made five such versions of *Chronik*, with five different soundtracks and the corresponding subtitles. Christiane Lang-Drewanz spoke herself the French commentary, as she did the “original” German version, with a strong German accent. For the Dutch, Italian and English versions, she was replaced by another woman (Margret Schumacher, Rita Ehrhardt, Gisela Hume), who pronounced the text each time with a German accent. It was the first of Straub and Huillet’s experiences with the inexhaustible aesthetic resources of accents, orally marking the matter of the language, estranging it from itself, attacking it from the outside to make it heard again. The two preceding films had remained inside German, with Heinrich Böll’s rather classical 20th century language. *Chronik* already had to go in search for another German, the eighteenth century language that comes and alters today’s German like period instruments come and undermine the too familiar sounds of Bach’s scores. This estrangement process, opening the speech through a paradoxical, shifted reterritorialization, inaugurates a movement in Huillet and Straub’s work, of which *Othon* (1969), from the French of Corneille (1664), would

be an extreme incarnation. The language spoken with an accent, from the outside, spoken by people with a different mother tongue, is a 'minor' language, through which a collective dimension can be heard. It is moreover a radically oral language, able to escape from the culture of Gutenberg: the Straubs' love of accents and dialects echoes a few other precise moments in film history: the early talkies, especially Jean Renoir and Fritz Lang's films; and the direct cinema or "cinéma vérité" of the 1960s, (re)discovering direct sound in all its potentialities, whether in Pierre Perrault's or, very differently, in Peter Nestler's films.

These versions of *Chronik* are also, as always, works of love and friendship, based on translations made by Danièle Huillet with Jean-Marie Straub and friends from each country: Henk de By in Netherlands, Adriano Aprà (who would play Othon in the 1969 film) in Italy, Misha Donat in England. These collaborations rarely aimed at neutralizing the language, rather at exploring and emphasizing its foreignness—like Danièle Huillet's radical translations into French, some of which (Brecht's or Hölderlin's for instance) will remain as major literary works.

Much later in their work, from *Der Tod des Empedokles* (1986) on, Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub quite systematically made several versions of their films, which differed in sound but also in image. The number and order of shots remaining the same for all versions, the film structure being established once and for all, each version is composed of various takes of the same shots. Thus, variations appear in the tonality of acting, in light, in sound, in durations, and one version ends up being quite deeply different from another without any "shooting script" being ever able to keep a written trace of the changes. In *Chronik*, something else is at stake: the images remain the same; the gaps happen between images and sounds, faces and voices, the language of dialogues and the language of the commentary, country of the narrative and country of the spectator. But if the diction of the commentary changes, the speed of the speech, its grain and its thickness, its strangeness, then can the perception of the images remain unchanged? Do I see the same things if the rhythm of the voice I hear changes, if I get lost in the flow or if I stumble against commas or consonants? That is hard to say, but that constitutes the very heart of what have discovered, as an aesthetic and consequently a politic matter, the "talkies."

- ¹ Danièle Huillet, interview with Frédéric Bonnaud, Serge Kaganski and Dominique Marchais, “Un seul cinéaste au monde: nous,” *Les Inrockuptibles* 91 (12 February 1997): 52.
- ² “Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet”, by the *Cinamateka* group (Sebastian Schadhauer, Elias Chaluja, Gianna Mingrone, Jacques Fillion), revised by J.-M. Straub & D. Huillet, *Cahiers du cinéma* 223 (August-September 1970): 56.
- ³ Interview with Enzo Ungari, “Sur le son” (*Gong* n° 2, 1975), *Cahiers du cinéma* 260-261 (October 1975): 51.
- ⁴ K. Stockhausen, *Film 1:2* (June/July 1963): 52, translated by Barton Byg in his *Landscapes of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1995).
- ⁵ “Entretien avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet”, by Thierry Jousse and Vincent Vatrican with Jean-Claude Biette and Dominik Loss, *Cahiers du cinéma*, special issue « Musiques au cinéma », 1995, in Danièle Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub, *Chronique d’Anna Magdalena Bach*, (Toulouse: Ombres, 1996—then « Ombres »): 131.
- ⁶ Jean-Marie Straub, “Le Bachfilm,” interview in German edited by Enno Patalas (*Filmkritik* 11, 1966), translated from the French of Danièle Huillet (Ombres: 11).
- ⁷ *Signalement van Jean-Marie Straub*, directed by Henk de By for the Dutch public TV channel VARA (Vereniging van Arbeiders Radio-Amateurs), organ of the SDAP (Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij), in 1968. Johan van der Keuken was one the film’s three operators. Henk de By took part in translating *Chronik’s* titles in Dutch.
- ⁸ “Sur le son”: 51.
- ⁹ “Gespräch mit Danièle Huillet und Jean-Marie Straub,” by Helmut Färber, Frieda Grafe, Herbert Linder, Enno Patalas, *Filmkritik* 10 (1968): 688.
- ¹⁰ Ombres: 131.
- ¹¹ Jean-Marie Straub, “Mes dates clés”, *Libération* (30 April 2003): VI.
- ¹² Jean-Marie Straub, “Autobiographie” (1966), in Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet, *Écrits* (Paris: Independencia, 2012): 41.
- ¹³ “Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too,” *Enthusiasm* 1 (December 1975): 3.
- ¹⁴ Ombres: 133. Jürgens had notably appeared in 1957 in Nicholas Ray’s *Bitter Victory*.
- ¹⁵ “Andi Engel talks to Jean-Marie Straub, and Danièle Huillet is there too,” *Enthusiasm* 1 (December 1975): 3-4.
- ¹⁶ Jean-Marie Straub, *Enthusiasm*: 8.
- ¹⁷ Joel Rogers, “Jean-Marie Straub and Daniele Huillet Interviewed: Moses and Aaron as an

Object of Marxist Reflection,” *Jump Cut* 12-13 (1976), on line.

¹⁸ Jean-Marie Straub, Strasbourg, 1993, in Jean-Louis Raymond (ed.), *Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet* (Paris/Le Mans: Beaux Arts de Paris/École supérieure des Beaux-Arts du Mans, 2008): 52.

¹⁹ Th. W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995): 135.

²⁰ *Prisms*: 137.

²¹ *Prisms*: 146.

²² *Rencontres avec Jean-Marie Straub et Danièle Huillet*: 54.

²³ Den Haag: Nijhoff.

²⁴ Cf. Kailan R. Rubinoff, “Authenticity as a Political Act: Straub-Huillet’s *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* and the Post-War Bach Revival,” *Music and Politics*, 5:1 (winter 2011): 10.

²⁵ *Ombres*: 134.

²⁶ There is one exception or sort of exception to the direct sound rule in *Chronik*: the shot numbered 41 in the published script (*Ombres*: 48-49). Christiane Lang/Anna Magdalena performs the aria of the Funeral Music BWV 244a *with her back to the camera*. Her face is not seen: in Huillet and Straub’s logic, this allows the voice—really recorded live, in “direct” sound—to be not hers but Christa Degler’s. When Lang was hired to play the role of Anna Magdalena in 1958, she was supposed to sing this piece (she was then a singer with Kurt Thomas); some ten years later, she couldn’t anymore, for lack of practice. As a consequence, it was decided that she would be filmed from behind when singing. Another inscription in the film’s form of its complicated production history... (Thanks to Barbara Ulrich.)

²⁷ *Ombres*: 137.

²⁸ *Ombres*: 138. *Chronik* is the first collaboration between Huillet and Straub and Louis Hochet, who will remain their sound engineer on almost all their films until *Von heute auf morgen* (1996).

²⁹ *Ombres*: 139-140.

³⁰ *Ombres*: 139.

³¹ Shot in 1980-81, the film shows two separate series of landscapes, one in France with a commentary taken from Friedrich Engels’ writings, the other in Egypt with a commentary by Mahmud Hussein. Four soundtracks were recorded: in German, French, English, and Italian. The Engels text is spoken by Danièle Huillet in all four versions; the Hussein text is said by Bhagat el Nadi in French and English, and Gérard Samaan in German and Italian.