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ON FORECLOSURE AND *FRESH CHERRIES**

*To see one must take a position.*¹

Georges Didi-Huberman

Abstract: This is an attempt to put a video artwork – *Świeże wiśnie* [Fresh cherries] by Anna Baumgart to a critical test proposed by the film critic Serge Daney¹. Daney formulated it while discussing a number of films that emerged in Europe as a result of the Holocaust experience. He claims that first, an author creating a film dealing with such a theme should not place beauty before the just; second, the author should honestly acknowledge the impossibility of telling the story – the stopping point in the course of history, when storytelling freezes or runs idle, and finally, such a film should not be talking about amnesia or repression, but rather about foreclosure, that is a hallucinatory return to the reality of something upon which it was impossible to place a 'judgment of reality'.

Keywords: Anna Baumgart, Polish Contemporary Art, Video art, Serge Daney, Women's Rights, Film Theory, Jean-Luc Godard, French New Wave Cinema, Jacques Rivette.

It is not an exaggeration to claim that among the researchers working in the field of cultural studies there is a new wave of interest in the history of World War II, of its immediate consequences for culture in the broad sense and in the ways the after-war generations relate to these experiences. In Poland the echo of WWII is probably still one of the most pervasive topics in the mainstream public discourse. The number of articles published per year in the

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¹ In this paper I cite extensively from *Postcards from the cinema*, Serge Daney talks with Paul Grant. 2007. Berg Publishers.

Polish mainstream newspapers on the topic can be counted in thousands. Perhaps, with the passage of time, the events related to WWII gain certain exotic appeal, as was suggested by Claire Alexander², or perhaps this has more to do with “bringing back the nonpresence”, to cite the title of a commemorative discussion on the 69th anniversary of the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Falenica, Poland, during which *Fresh Cherries* – the video artwork that I am going to concentrate on in this paper was also screened.

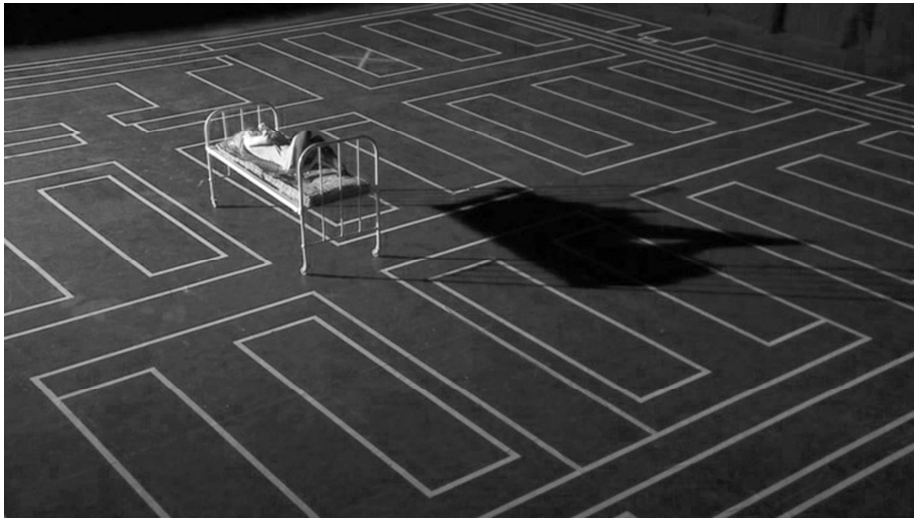
Found footage, archival film, document and false document, theatrical or even para-theatrical staging – this is how Agnieszka Rayzacher described Baumgart’s 18 minute long video during one of the many open public debates that her Warsaw-based art gallery, Lokal 30, organized to promote this film³. It is a piece rather easy to watch, even though the editing is fairly frisky. The author mixes film genres, adding popular musical fragments easily associated with the cultures of the countries involved in WWII, and edits in rapid sequence with clashing discourses⁴. For example, a scene set at a concentration camp brothel, where something emerges that can be described as a fragile feeling of love (prohibited in the camps, but known to preserve one’s humanity) is followed by the verbal description of a violent group rape from the point of view of a victim. The viewers usually tend to like the video-work

² During one of the plenary sessions of “Current Issues in European Cultural Studies” conference, organised by the Advanced Cultural Studies Institute of Sweden, in Norrköping, Sweden, 15-17 June 2011.

³ obieg.pl/rozmowy/20441; See also Tomasz Kozak, 2010, *Old Sores Must/not/ be re-opened?* Lokal_30, London; and Tomasz Kozak, 2010, *Wytępić te wszystkie bestie?* Ed. 40000 malarzy, Warsaw. A number of other artists connected to lokal_30 approach in their art the question of traumatic memories and the banality of evil. To mention just a few works: the video *The Hospital of Transfiguration* by Zuzanna Janin deals with the sublimation of an omnipresent will to kill – a work in homage to Prof. Antoni Kepiński – a former Miranda camp prisoner, known for his groundbreaking research and therapeutic work with the survivors of Nazi concentration camps – and to Prof. Józef Bednarz, a psychiatrist killed by the Nazis in 1939 together with his patients. Another work by Janin, the installation *Memory (1992-2001)*, although a very personal piece, it was misinterpreted by some as a comment on Auschwitz, probably because of the free associations that the materials she used brought to mind – a room with printed names on the walls filled with fog. See also the multimedia works of Tomasz Kozak, many of which have been inspired by the texts of the Auschwitz survivor, the poet Tadeusz Borowski.

⁴ The *Fresh Cherries*’ credits font with the upside-down letter B in it is, of course, not an attempt to embellish the film, but a homage to Auschwitz victims, and especially to the welders’ team headed by Jan Liwacz, which manufactured the infamous inscription above the entrance of that Nazi concentration camp, viewed by many as an act of sabotage through art of the camp regime, but also it is a message from Baumgart herself: this work of art is (also) an act of sabotage of the viewer’s consciousness.

and praise the protagonists and the author⁵.



Anna Baumgart, *Fresh Cherries*, film, 2010, courtesy Anna Baumgart



Anna Baumgart, *Fresh Cherries*, film, 2010, courtesy Anna Baumgart

⁵ With the only exception know to me: Jaruga R. *KURWY koncentracyjne*, *Nie*, 42/2010. <http://www.nie.com.pl/art23916.htm>.

Fresh Cherries shows a session of *Systemic constellation* (family) therapy, which, according to its founder Bert Hellinger⁶, offers an almost literal possibility to travel back in time. The participants try to solve their psychological conflicts by positioning themselves in certain ways (that is – *take a position*) forming so called “constellations”. They seldom talk. The main character – Klara Bielawka, is playing herself, a contemporary actress who is trying to get into a new, difficult role. She is supposed to play a concentration camp prostitute (and later a Polish woman raped by the Soviet liberators/occupants). There is a male and a female Hellingerian therapist and three female assistants – ‘representatives’, as they are called, who more or less actively contribute to the therapeutic session. An important role is played by the extravagant and fairly famous Polish film operator/ director – Marcin Koszałka, playing himself; the academic researcher Joanna Ostrowska discusses the hierarchization of the victims in the Nazi concentration camps; one can also hear the artist herself, directing behind the camera. Fragments from an archival film might appear somewhat stylistically discontinuous with the rest of the original filming⁷. These come from the only documentary film in Poland showing the hair-cutting punishment inflicted after WWII on the women who were known to maintain intimate relationships with the enemy. However, the story of the characters documented in these archival shots is not very different from that of the women impersonated by Klara. The soundtrack and the title *Fresh Cherries* are based on a song about unrequited love interpreted by one of the most popular pre-war Polish singers, Tadeusz Faliszewski.⁸

During the film’s premiere at *Muranów*, one of Warsaw’s main art cinemas, Baumgart’s work sporadically provoked bursts of laughter in some of the viewers. With the declared theme of the movie – the taboos, the stigmas and the hierarchization of the victims of the WWII, as well as the processes of shaping the representation of war in the eyes of the younger generation – this

⁶ Who seems to have been displaying sympathy and compassion towards dictatorships such as Adolf Hitler’s regime and national-socialist movement: Herman Nimis, *Bert Hellinger’s controversial therapy* http://afa.home.xs4all.nl/alert/engels/hellinger_e.html.

⁷ Didi Hubermans mentions in *Images in spite of all*, the fact that there is a certain going back in time in Godard’s way through his film-editing in his *Histoire(s) du cinema*, originally described by Jacques Aumont. In addition to that Aumont mentions that the insertion of the archival shooting in the tempo of the film doesn’t diminish in any way the photographic recording of its nature. The film editing is together with the declared effects of *Constellation Therapy* another way in which Baumgart is trying to take us back in time.

⁸ Written by Walery Jarzębiec, music by Zygmunt Białostocki: <http://teksty.org/tadeusz-faliszewski,szczescie-trzeba-rwac-jak-swieze-wisnie>.

was to me quite troubling. Viewers seldom laugh when the film is shown in smaller groups. During the premiere the laughter was triggered by the appearance of two characters who assume a rather comical posture: the operator-actor Koszałka and the grotesque hellingerian female therapist. One might think that the humour is not appropriate, or even obscene, in a film that attempts to deal seriously with the fate of concentration camp inmates.

In order to understand the use of humor in the context of a Holocaust-related art production I suggest we look at a number of works known for their inherent comedy. Benigni's *La vita è bella*, for instance, was criticized on countless occasions for its comedy⁹. However, the humor in Benigni's film is only there for the sake of a character, a young boy, whose life his father (played by Benigni himself) is trying to save. The humor is there because it seems to ensure the boy's survival¹⁰. The viewer is just a passerby, witnessing by pure chance the almost too exemplary relationship between the father and the son.¹¹ Humour can also be used as a tool in trying to spell out the facts which are usually traumatic and very difficult to cope with, for instance, in *Maus*, the visual novel by Art Spiegelman.

There is also a significant number of episodes of the animated comedy series *South Park* that touch upon the Holocaust-related issues¹². Among the four boys, the main characters of the series, are Kyle Broflovski – a Jewish boy, and Eric Cartman, who is explicitly anti-Jewish; nevertheless they have kept hanging out together for 16 seasons already. In this case the use of humor frequently mixed with toilet-jokes is even more controversial¹³. On the other

⁹ See among others: Kobi Niv *Life is Beautiful, But Not for Jews: Another View of the Film by Benigni*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc | 2003-10.

¹⁰ Krystyna Chiger, the author of the *The Girl in the Green Sweater* and the real person behind one of Agnieszka Holland's characters in her film *The Darkness*, describes her father in an interview to the Polish issue of *Newsweek* (29/2011) as "a person with a great sense of humor, which helped to pull everybody from the deep blackness". The film and Chiger's book is based on the story of survival of a Jewish family in the city's sewage system after the liquidation of a Jewish ghetto.

¹¹ One can't fail to recollect here Tadeusz Borowski's story in which a member of Sonderkommando is telling how he escorted his own father to the gas chamber.

¹² See the episodes *The passion of the Jew* Season 8 or *Cartman's List* Season 12, of course these episodes and many more from SP, could also be interpreted just as fancy movie reviews. southparkstudious.com.

¹³ Despite its 43 uncensored uses of the racial slur 'nigger', the season 11 episode *With Apologies to Jesse Jackson* generated relatively little controversy, as most in the black community praised the episode for its context and its comedic way of conveying other races' perceptions of how black people must feel when hearing the word. For more: Vanessa E. Jones (January 29, 2008). *No offense, but...* The Boston Globe.

hand, Larry David, in one of the episodes of his *Curb Your Enthusiasm* show offers a job to a person just because he has numbers written on his arm; but they turn out to be the numbers of a lottery ticket and not a Nazi camp tattoo. In another episode he puts together at a table two survivors: one of the Holocaust, and the other one an actor from the series *Survival*, who seems to be oblivious of WWII history. This ends in a fight between those two. Perhaps, comedy creators like Larry David, Trey Parker and Matt Stone are perceived by the mainstream of American culture to be beyond good or evil. Their vogue grants them the right to spell out attempts to bring back the non-presence, and to produce artistic and critical discourse through the channel of the US entertainment industry. Humor is what opens the door to the past. Besides, unlike the bold Larry David, who always seems to get himself into trouble for voicing what he thinks, in *South Park*, Cartman, one of the four main characters, the chubby boy, is usually the one who is punished most of all and usually quite roughly, from the very first episode, Kyle, on the other hand, remains unscathed, and turns out to be right at the end of each episode, which probably settles the account¹⁴.

Another Holocaust-related fantasy is *Trenul Vieții* [The train of life] by Radu Mihaileanu, in which the Jews from an Eastern European village build themselves a train on which they happily escape from the Nazis. Only by the end of the film does the viewer learn that the whole story is only the imagination of a concentration camp inmate. Here the humor is addressed to the inmate himself. His imagination might be what keeps him alive and, perhaps, increases his chances of survival¹⁵.

In her film Baumgart uses similar scenery as Lars Von Trier in his film *Dogville* (black floor on which nonexistent buildings are painted with thin white lines, with very few props – a set perceived as a set). It has been suggested that she intentionally cites Von Trier, a director who constantly brings into the cinematic discourse examples of vulnerable and distressed women¹⁶. Some

¹⁴ Interestingly, the eight and nine-year-old British children voted Cartman as their favorite personality in a 1999 poll. *Entertainment Cartman top with kids*, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/430977.stm.

¹⁵ For example, as Mauthausen and Gusen camps' survivor Stanisław Grzesiuk argues in his memoir *Five years in Kazet*. Apparently it could also be the cause of one's imprisonment, as it happened to the drama professor in Puipa's *Forest of the Gods*, arrested for his ironic remarks that he uttered during his lectures. The character and the film were based on a memoir with the same title by Balys Sruoga.

¹⁶ This particular film is one of the best stories about human exploitation and pay back. From Claudio Carvahlo review on imdb.com.

suggested that Baumgart attempted a homage to Von Trier. There were also voices murmuring that Lars von Trier's name was used by Baumgart as an advertising tool to promote her work. Others on the contrary claimed that it is a feminist critique of Von Trier's position – if Von Trier is in fact a misogynist (and with his repeated use of female exploitation in his films he could be interpreted as such).

Slavoj Žižek claims in his *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, that all modern films are ultimately about the possibility or impossibility of making a film. *Dogville* is a film that deals allegorically with the belief in Cinema itself: with the question of how to make a film today which the viewer will fully believe¹⁷. The mystery of film consists in the fact that even though the viewer knows it is an illusion, it fascinates him and it does not prevent his identification¹⁸. If anything, it makes him get deeper into the tensions of his inner life. In a way, the naïve belief is undermined, deconstructed through irony, but Von Trier wants to be serious with the magic. Irony (humor yet again¹⁹) is used with the set to make us believe. There is something in the illusion that is more real than the reality behind it. Interestingly, unlike many of the *Dogville* reviewers, Žižek²⁰ is one of the few that are actually acutely aware of the structure of the set and can put it into words. For many critics the set is even more abstract/invisible than it really is in *Dogville*.

¹⁷ Of course you're not obliged to believe what you see – it can even be dangerous – but you're not obliged to hold on to cinema either. There has to be some risk and some virtue, that is, some value, in the act of showing something to someone who is capable of seeing it. Learning how to “read” the visual and “decode” messages would be useless if there wasn't still the minimal, but deep seeded conviction that *seeing* is superior to not seeing, and that what isn't seen “in time” will never really be seen. Cinema is an art of the present. /S. Daney/.

¹⁸ In *Fresh Cherries* this alienation is taken to even a higher level: the actors are not real actors and the real actors only play actors.

¹⁹ Michael Rothberg writes in his *Traumatic realism* *(2000, University of Minesota Press) about *Patrimony. A true story* by Philip Roth. A friend of the author's father is asking the author to help him in publishing his memoir. The man claims he survived the war by hiding in the beds of various arian women. The text contains graphic depictions of his sexual exploits with the women who hide him, which is quite a twist to the unusual anguish of Holocaust testimonies. The episode suggests, argues Rothberg, that there might be something pornographic about making images and ultimately commodities out of Holocaust. It is as if the fundamental obscenity of the events themselves cannot be represented without a pornographic contamination of the person doing the representing. Yet still, one could replace it with farce.

²⁰ Similarly, the protagonist of Algimantas Puipa' *Forest of the Gods* states: No props or property on the scene! Let's refuse the cliches! Let in some fresh air! Let's not eviscerate the subject! Property on the stage is like a live mouse in the teeth of a painted cat. See also Gene A. Plumka, *Holocaust Drama, The Theater of Atrocity*, 2009, Cambridge Univ. Press.

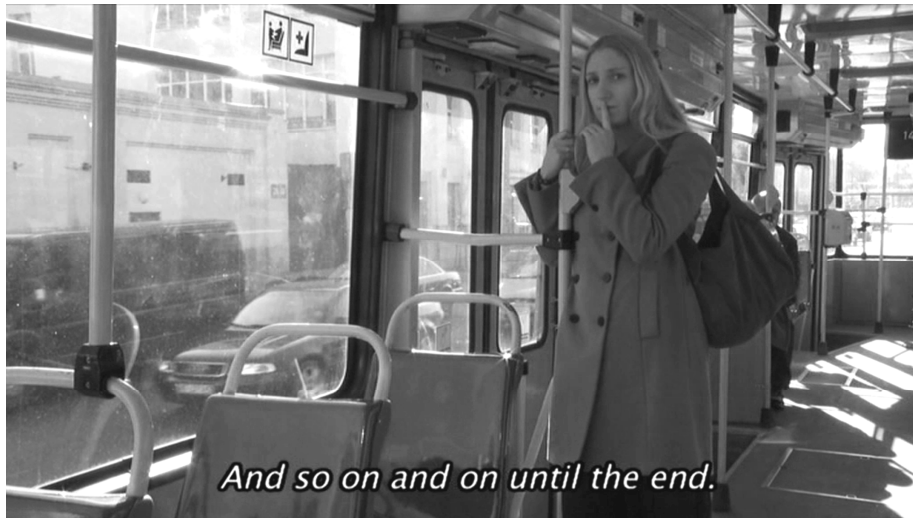
Secondly, the two films bring into light similar issues. Grace's arrival in *Dogville*, her imprisonment and later her helplessness is the catalyst that, step by step, tempts the apparently decent people of *Dogville* to inflict upon her greater and greater humiliations to feed their now unrestrained desires. She becomes the city's whore. There is a scene in which Grace confronts the people of *Dogville* with a critique of their immoral behavior. Their response is to either deny the truth of what she has said or to blame Grace herself for tempting them, which resembles the statements in Baumgart's *Fresh Cherries*.

Lastly, one might claim that Baumgart used the visual methodology developed by Von Trier as well as the *Systemic Constellation* therapy routine in order to approach a difficult, perhaps an untellable story. This is somewhat similar to what is attempted in this essay, where Baumgart's film is discussed through the perspective of an already existing methodology, i.e. the critical test developed by Serge Daney.

Although it can be applied to any film, the context in which Daney presents his scale is similar to the one that Baumgart focuses on in her work. Daney describes two films that in his opinion are situated at the two opposite ends of his test. Its negative end is occupied by such films as *Kapo*, directed in 1960 by Gillo Pontecorvo. Daney discusses it along the lines of Jacques Rivette's *On Abjection*²¹, in which the author denounced Pontecorvo's film. When Daney read the article for the first time, it provoked in him both an aesthetic and a moral shock, and it would determine his decision to become a critic. Daney claims that he has never seen the obscure *Kapo*. Yet at the same time he has seen it. Rivette showed it to him with words. Rivette did not recount the film's narrative in his article. Instead he was content to describe one shot in a single sentence. The sentence, engraved in Daney's memory, read: "Just look at the shot in *Kapo* where Riva commits suicide by throwing herself on electric barbed wire: the man who decides at this moment to track forward and reframe the dead body in a low-angle shot – carefully positioning the raised hand in the corner of the final frame – deserves only the most profound contempt." Therefore a simple camera movement could be the one movement not to make. The one movement one must – obviously – be abject to make. Over the years, "the tracking shot in *Kapo* would become Daney's portable dogma, the axiom that was not up for discussion, the breaking point of any debate. No tracking shots in Baumgart's film either. I also see in the author's indecisiveness whether to qualify her work as a piece of visual art or cinema, a step towards renouncing beauty for the sake of the just. In fact, Baumgart

²¹ In *Cahiers du cinéma*, June, 1961.

addresses this question directly during one of the dialogues between Klara and Marcin Koszałka (famous for his extrovert, painfully sincere documentaries about his own family). Klara says that the film they will be working on is going to be about sex and death. Unexpectedly, Marcin answers that for him the most important thing is the beauty of the film.



Anna Baumgart, *Fresh Cherries*, film, 2010, courtesy Anna Baumgart

At the other end, the just end of his scale, Daney places *Nuit et brouillard* [Night and Fog], directed by Alain Resnais in 1955. Daney became well acquainted with the famous scenes of piles of dead bodies, hair, glasses, and teeth and listened to Jean Cayrol's despondent commentary recited by Michel Bouquet along with Hanns Eisler's music, which seemed ashamed of itself for existing. A strange baptism of images – to comprehend at the same time that the camps were real and that the film was just. It seemed that the cinema (alone?) was capable of approaching the limits of distorted humanity. The distances set by Resnais between the subject filmed, the subject filming, and the subject spectator were the only ones possible. Although Godard would probably say that in *Fresh Cherries* the image lacks violence²², this film can

²² Why not shock the viewer with a scene of group raping like in Elem Klimov's *Come and see*? Even though in *Fresh Cherries* there is a scene, which seem to trigger powerful emotions: The viewer sees a closeup of Klara's tensed face. She is laying on the bed with her face down looking at the floor, talking mechanically about the brothel's routine. Her

be doubtlessly watched again and again. In fact, I came to watch *Night and Fog* because of *Fresh Cherries*.

The movies Daney places on the ends of his scale touch upon the fate of the people that Anna Baumgart is focusing on in *Fresh Cherries* – the women who were forced to prostitute in order to survive in the concentration camp brothels – known also as *puffs* or *Sonderbau*²³, or *joy divisions*, as they are known to the English speaker. In *Night and Fog*, the camp brothels are mentioned in passing. In *Kapo*, they are more explicitly noted, and with the focus on a character. Unlike Daney, I had to watch *Kapo* in order to understand his and Rivette's stances and to be able to subscribe to a point of view. To understand what he meant when he was asked if *Nuit et brouillard* was a "beautiful" film, and he answered "No, it was a *just* film". It is *Kapo* that wanted to be a beautiful film and was not. Daney would never quite see the difference between the just and the beautiful – hence his rather "workaday" boredom in front of solely beautiful images.

Rivette's verdict bore the question of the tracking shot as well as that of *framing*. The exacerbated, erotic consciousness of the inside and outside, of what enters, what leaves, and finally the very original status of this "outside," the *out of frame* of cinema, which would eventually provoke the critics at the *Cahiers du Cinema* to engage in theoretical orgies. But Daney was less at ease with the filmmakers who did not appear to draw their effects from this eroticization of the frame.

body is shaken catatonically by somebody the viewer doesn't see. The rest is behind the frame.

²³ Already in 1968 Jean-Luc Godard showed totalitarian images together with pornography: in the *Sympathy for the Devil*: covers of porn magazines were shown while somebody read fragments from Hitler; In *Histoire(s) du cinema*, a dead KZ victim is shown after a fragment of a pornographic film – an opportunity for Godard, in his *off* comment to differentiate between the aggression of the image from the point of view of 'any creative act', and real brutality, which a totalitarian system stretches on the whole life: 'each creative act contains an actual threat for the one who dares to conduct it, and it's through this that the work of art affects the viewer or reader. If the mind refuses the aggravation and the inflicting violence on the consciousness, then it runs the risk of an unfruitful experience of the whole brutality, liberated by its absence. If death is shown together with sex, this is not for debasing death, and neither to necrophiliate sex, quite the opposite. As it happens, in the Nazi camps, the same neutral adjective "sonder" (special) described both death ("Sonderehandlung" a word that can be translated as "special treatment" but in fact it meant – gasing) and sex (in the word "Sonderbau" – special building, in fact, a brothel). Film editing wants to pinpoint exactly this unity. /G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of all*, author's translation./ In the same text one can find a discussion of the debate that emerged between Claude Lanzman and Godard on the relationship that exists between film editing and the non-assimilation of the ideas that are being shown by the artist/director.



Extract from archival footage, Anna Baumgart, *Fresh Cherries*, film, 2010,
courtesy Anna Baumgart

Daney claims that for him the space [of film criticism] was not so much a vast field, but a narrow door. On the noble side was the *jouissance* of the just distance and its reverse, the sublime or sublimated necrophilia. On the not so noble side was the possibility of a completely different *jouissance*, impossible to sublimate. It was Godard who, showing him videotapes of 'concentration camp porn' tucked away in his video collection at Rolle, was surprised that nothing had been said about those films and that no interdiction had been pronounced. As if their creators' cowardly intentions and their viewers' trivial fantasies somehow 'protected' them from censorship and indignation. Evidence perhaps of the persistence in the domain of sub-culture of the silent claim of an obligatory interlacing of the executioners and the victims. Daney was never really upset about the existence of 'concentration camp porn'. He had for these films – just as for any openly pornographic films – the almost polite tolerance one has for the expression of a fantasy that, so naked, claims only the sad monotony of its necessary repetition. It is a different pornography that always revolted him: the 'artistic' pornography of *Kapo*, or a little later, of Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*, and other retro films of the 1970s. To this after-the-fact aestheticization, Daney would prefer the

obstinate return of the non-images in *Night and Fog*, or the unfurling drives of *Ilsa, She Wolfe of the S.S.*, which he would not want to see. At least these films had the honesty to acknowledge the impossibility of telling a story, the stopping point in the course of history, when storytelling freezes or runs idle.

Thus we should not be talking about amnesia or repression but rather about *foreclosure*, not meant as a deprivation of a certain right of buying back the mortgaged goods – a legal proceeding that bars or extinguishes a mortgagor's equity of redemption in the mortgaged property, but in its Lacanian definition: as a hallucinatory return to the real of something upon which it was impossible to place a “judgment of reality.” The test of foreclosure is the ultimate and most important sub-scale of Daney's axiom. Paradoxically, *Ilsa...* is much closer to *Night and Fog* on Daney's scale because of its inherent feature of bluntness. For Daney, *Nuit et brouillard* is unlike any other film. It gives a positive answer to the rather brutal question 'Does this watch you?'. The spectator that Daney was before *Nuit et brouillard* and the filmmaker who tried to show the un-representable with this film, were linked by a complicit symmetry. It is either the spectator who is suddenly 'missing from his place' and is stilled while the film continues, or the film which, instead of “continuing”, folds back onto itself and onto a temporarily definitive 'image' that allows the spectator to continue believing in cinema and the subject-citizen to live his life. Spectator-stilled, image-stilled: cinema entered adulthood. The corpses in *Nuit et brouillard* and then two years later those in the opening shots of *Hiroshima mon amour* are among those 'things' that watched Daney more than he watched them. Hitchcock was also one of those who succeeded in producing these kind of images. Was it perhaps because Hitchcock caught with his own eyes, with his own camera the reality of the camps²⁴? The documentary that he helped to film in 1945 was commissioned by the British Government but it was deemed too grisly for

²⁴ Facing the camps, was there any other possible justness besides the anti-spectacular *Nuit et brouillard*? Yes, George Stevens' documentary made at the end of the war, the first movie to record the opening of the camps in color. The colors transform it – without any abjection – into art. What's amazing in Stevens' film is that it's the story of a journey: the daily progression of a small group of soldiers and filmmakers wandering across a destroyed Europe that totally overwhelms the entire crew. Daney believed that the beauty of Stevens' film is due less to the justness of the distance than to the innocence of the gaze. Justness is the burden of the one who comes 'after', innocence, the terrible grace accorded to the first to arrive, to the first one who simply makes the cinematic gesture. One had to be American – that is to say, to believe in the fundamental innocence of the spectacle – to make the German population walk by the open tombs, to show them what they were living next to, so well and so badly.



Anna Baumgart, *Fresh Cherries*, film, 2010,
courtesy Anna Baumgart



Dachau girl, Hitchcock documentary, 1945,
courtesy public domain

release after WWII²⁵. There seem to be no film shots of the women who were working in the puffs. However, in the documentary Hitchcock helped to film, made during the camp's liberation, there is a mention of the brothels from

²⁵ Recently it was loaded on the internet: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-6076323184217355958>.

Dachau concentration camps – when the women died, they were replaced by a fresh contingent from Ravensbrück. At this moment (min. 34) in the film the viewer is faced with a close-up of a young woman's face, whose features are shockingly similar to Klara's. The woman in Hitchcock's documentary is a mystery. Nothing is known about her. It could be just a coincidence, a young woman from the crowd that came to see the Americans filming, or it could be one of the girls who actually worked in the brothel. They are the only moving images that exist. This similarity was even more astounding that Baumgart had not seen Hitchcock's film before she made *Fresh Cherries*.

The sphere of the visible had ceased to be wholly available: there were gaps and holes, necessary hollows and superfluous plenitude, forever missing images and always defective gazes. 'There are things,' wrote Rivette 'that must be approached with fear and trembling. Death is undoubtedly such a thing, and how does one, at the moment of filming such a mysterious thing, avoid feeling like an impostor?' Since there are only a few films in which nobody dies, there were many occasions to fear and tremble. Indeed certain film-makers were not impostors.

Daney was sure that most of the time cinema oscillated between *Night and Fog* and *Kapo*. He often stumbled onto this smuggler's way of adding extra parasitic beauty or complicit information to the scenes that did not need it. Yet this is not always easy to determine, as is the case of Rossellini's films. Where does the event finish? Where is the cruelty? Where does obscenity begin and where does pornography end? Those were the questions constitutive of 'post-camp' cinema. This cinema had one characteristic: it was 'cruel'; the viewers of the time had another: they accepted this cruelty. Cruelty was on the 'good side'. It was cruelty that objected to academic 'illustration' and destroyed the counterfeit sentimentalism of wordy humanism, and in an archaic sense; cruelty was as old as cinema itself. The frame is the cruelty, the obligation not to flee, and not to shy away from what *is*, and cinema alone was able to tame it. But today this cruelty does not seem all that terrible. However, there is no cruelty in Baumgart's film. No scenes of rape or violation/aggression. Yet everything is there, present outside the frames. According to Anna Baumgart, the reproduction of a straight act of cruelty is pornographic.

As for Daney, he remembers the exact moment when he knew that the axiom regarding the tracking shot in *Kapo* should be revisited and the homemade concept of modern cinema revised. In 1979, French television broadcast *Holocaust*, the American mini-series by Marvin Chomsky. In 1945 the

Americans allowed George Stevens to make his astonishing documentary, which they did not broadcast because of the Cold War. Unable to deal with that history, which after all is not theirs, the American entrepreneurs of entertainment had temporarily abandoned it to European artists. But they retained a right to buy that history, like any other story, and sooner or later Hollywood and the television machine would dare to tell 'our' story. It would tell it very carefully, but it would sell it to us as another American story. So *Holocaust* would become a story about the misfortunes that tear apart and destroy a Jewish family: there would be extras looking a little too fat, good performances, generic humanism, action, and melodrama. And we would sympathize. It would be therefore only in the form of the American docu-drama that this history could escape the cine-clubs and could, via television, concern the servile version of the 'whole of mankind' that is the global TV audience. The simulation – *Holocaust* was certainly no longer confronting the strangeness of the humanity capable of a crime against itself, but it remained obstinately incapable of bringing back the singular beings – each with a story, a face, and a name – who made up this history, who were the exterminated Jews. Rather it would be drawing – Spiegelman's *Maus*²⁶ – that later dared to make this salutary act of re-singularisation. Drawing and not cinema, as it is true that American cinema hates singularity. With *Holocaust*, Marvin Chomsky brought back, modestly and triumphantly, our perennial aesthetic enemy: the good old sociological program with its well-studied cast of suffering specimens and its light show of animated police sketches. We had come full circle and we had truly lost.

In the case of *Kapo*, it was still possible to be upset with Pontecorvo for inconsiderately abolishing the distance he should have maintained. The tracking shot was immoral for the simple reason that it was putting us – he as a filmmaker and Daney as a spectator – where they/we did not belong. Where Daney anyway could not and did not want to be, because he was 'deported' from his real situation as a spectator-witness forced to be part of the picture. What was the meaning of Godard's formula if not that one should never put oneself where one is not nor should one speak for others? Imagining Pontecorvo's gestures deciding upon and mimicking the tracking shot with his hands, Daney was even more upset with him because in 1961 a tracking shot still meant rails, a crew and physical effort. Now it is just a click on the mouse or the touch pad.

²⁶ On the presence of *Maus* in Baumgart's work see *Wszyscy rozmawiają o pogodzie. My nie*. <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Serwiskulturalny/BaumgartWszyscyrozmawiajao pogodzieMynie/menuid-305.html>.

The cinema of terror that European cinephiles knew and supported, produced what needed to be produced. That must have ended around 1975, with the death of Pasolini. The cinema of terror is behind us. Contemporary cinema – with its many good films – is more a meticulous exploration of the mental case. Still, Daney did not see any return to the ludic values of yesterday. Today the wager of images passes by the violence of media and advertising, a violence which from now on cinema seems to be exempt from²⁷. The strategy of Benetton, reality shows, the Gulf War without images, those are the serious things today.

The present was for Daney a sort of absolute resistance, a defiance of the necessity of planning, programming, and previewing, and above all of working personally to obtain one's pleasures: that which exasperated and horrified him. It is the pride of those who possess nothing, and it is already the tracking shot in *Kapo*: you cannot have both the action of the scene *and* the camera movement, you have to choose.

It is the absence of Vichy, the absence of the images of collaboration which, over the course of many years, revealed itself to Daney as unacceptable. In this last interview, from a mystic and intransigent point of view, Daney claimed that if cinema is the art of the present (in the widest sense, not only that of reporting, but also the present of calling in to memory, of evocation: for example Straubs' films) then when it does not take place, it does not take place. This allows us to understand one thing: cinema only exists to make what has already been seen once return: well seen, poorly seen, and unseen. Ten years later *Nuit et brouillard* returned what was not seen, as the images of the camps filmed by George Stevens, or those assembled by Hitchcock, had been stashed away by the Americans and the British. In this capacity as an art of the present, or an art of vigilance, cinema was already suffering from severe schizophrenia, since the people who ordered the images were the same ones who had put them aside due to the Cold War. Even though they are just archival films, the only ones made at the time of the discovery, they have an enormous effect on us when we now watch them for the first time. The film that marked Daney, *Nuit et brouillard*, was made almost fifteen years after the discovery of the camps. The film inscribes itself in this delay as a work of art of extraordinary precision and taste. But it is possible that this rhetoric resembles the rhetoric of the tracking shot in *Kapo*. Accordingly many important things concerning the fate of the individuals, the nations and the

²⁷ Not entirely, Lars von Trier, whose work inspired the making of *Fresh Cherries*, pursues an unusually violent approach in his filmmaking.

masses were strictly not seen, in order to be able to return. Daney was afraid that this was not definitive. He remembered meeting Chris Marker in Hong Kong. Marker was excited to learn that the Red Army had also filmed. They always wondered what they could have filmed. Today it remains an anecdotal question: it is not important. There was a time when things took time to exist, in slow, difficult and painful processes: they took time to build up, and this time had value. Today the benefits have to be seen immediately. Maybe cinema had the capacity to make synchronous or histological cuts, seizing the work of time – not just death at work, but humans at work. The history of the century, with all its horrors, is also the history of those who did not see, who did not trust what they saw or heard, and that was paid for with millions of deaths. That is insufficient, that does not prevent us from being mistaken or deluded, but it is good to go back to the argument of the sorrowful Godard when he asks in *Histoire(s) du Cinema*: can we not watch one last time what the people were not able to or did not want to see, and what resulted from their refusal to see?

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag does not describe her experience of seeing the pictures taken in the concentration camps as a revelation of absolute knowledge. She does not write that these photographs gave her the complete understanding of the Shoah. For her these photographs were just an opening of the gates of knowledge through the moment of seeing – a negative epiphany, an instance of contemporary revelation. Therefore these images were crucial for the knowledge itself. As was Resnais's film for Daney: "I learned that the human condition and industrial butchery were not incompatible and that the worst had just happened"²⁸ For those who want to know, and for those who want to know how, knowledge offers neither a miracle nor a pause. It is the knowledge with no end, an endless coming-closer to an event, not a single capturing into some frames of the revealed certainty. There is no yes or no, knowing everything or nothing. There is a heavy veil because of the destruction itself, and the destruction of the archives by the Nazis – but the veil wrinkles, lifting itself slightly and shaking us, every time when a testimony is heard in the way it has been uttered in the midst of one's own concealment, every time when a document is discovered. For me, *Fresh cherries* had the effect of lifting the curtain. Certainly, Baumgart's film imposes on the viewer a hallucinatory return to the reality of something upon which it was impossible to place a 'judgment of reality.'

²⁸ To give another example, Ronald Harwood's theater, or more precisely the drama *Taking sides* discussed in Gene A. Plumka's *Holocaust Drama, The Theater of Atrocity*, 2009, Cambridge Univ. Press.

CONCLUSION

The motto for this paper was taken from George Didi-Huberman's *Eye of History*. I will paraphrase here a fragment from another of his books, *The images above all*: Each creation of an image is torn out from the impossibility to describe reality. Especially by the artists who do not want to surrender to un-imaginability, which is obviously experienced when anyone comes into contact with the destruction of a person by another person. They produce a series of images, an editing above all – they know well that disasters are multiplied into infinity... Artists have reworked unimagibility in all possible ways in order to extract from it anything outside the silence. The world of history becomes in their works an obsession, the plague of the imagination, the proliferation of characters – the similarities and differences – in the same vortex of time. Baumgart's *Fresh Cherries* is an example of such a work.

O WYKLUCZENIU I ŚWIEŻYCH WIŚNIACH (streszczenie)

Artykuł stanowi próbę poddania pracy wideo, zatytułowanej *Świeże wiśnie* autorstwa Anny Baumgart, krytycznemu testowi zaproponowanemu przez krytyka filmowego Serge'a Daney'a. Daney sformułował go w czasie omawiania szeregu filmów, które powstały w Europie w wyniku doświadczeń Holocaustu. Twierdzi on, że po pierwsze, autor/ka tworząc film o takim temacie nie powinien/na stawiać piękna nad słuszością, po drugie, powinien/na nadać filmowi szczerłość, która uniemożliwiłaby opowiadanie fabuły. Jest to moment, w którym opowiadanie toczy się na jałowym biegu lub ulega zawieszeniu. Film taki nie powinien mówić w związku z tym o amnezji lub represji, lecz raczej o wykluczeniu, o halucynacyjnym powrocie do prawdziwości czegoś, czego nie można było osądzić „orzeczeniem rzeczywistości”.

Słowa kluczowe: Anna Baumgart, współczesna sztuka polska, video art, Serge Daney, prawa kobiet, teoria filmu, Jean-Luc Godard, francuska Nowa Fala w filmie, Jacques Rivette.