

On Foreclosure and *Fresh Cherries*

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This is an attempt to put a video-art work - *Świeże wiśnie (Fresh cherries)* by Anna Baumgart to a critical test proposed by the film critic Serge Daney¹. Daney formulates his axiom while discussing a number of films that emerged in Europe as a result of the Holocaust experience. He claims that an author creating a film dealing with such a theme should not place beauty before the just; the author should endow the film with the honesty to acknowledge the impossibility of telling a story - the stopping point in the course of history, when storytelling freezes or runs idle, and finally, such a film should not be speaking about amnesia or repression, but rather about foreclosure, that is a hallucinatory return to the real of something upon which it was impossible to place a “judgment of reality”.

“To see one must take a position. “

Georges Didi-Huberman, *Quand les images prennent position. L'œil de l'histoire, 1*

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

INTRODUCTION

It is not an exaggeration to claim that among researchers working in the field of cultural studies there is a new wave of interest in the history of WWII, of its immediate consequences on culture in the large sense and in the ways the after-war generations relate to these experiences. There were over a dozen of papers on these issues presented at this very conference. 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 Polish mainstream newspapers can be counted in thousands. Perhaps, as time passes by the events related to WWII gain certain exotic features, as Claire Alexander mentioned during one of the plenary sessions here at ACSIS, or this public interest could be explained in terms of “Bringing back” the nonpresence, to cite the title of a commemorative discussion organized for the occasion of 69 years after the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto in Falenica, Poland, during which *Fresh Cherries* – the video-art work that I am going to concentrate on in this paper was also screened.

THE CHARACTERS AND THE NON-PLOT

Found footage, archival film, document and false document, theatrical staging, or even para-theatrical, this is how Agnieszka Rayzacher describes Baumgart's video during one of the many open public debates that her Warsaw-based art gallery, Lokal_30, organized to promote this film². The video-work is 18 minutes long. It is rather easy to watch even though the editing is fairly frisky. The author does not only mix film genres, adding popular musical fragments easily associated with the cultures of the countries involved in WWII, but also edits in immediate sequence clashing discourses³. For example, a scene in which the emergence of a something that can be described as a fragile feeling of love in a KZ brothel, love being a prohibited feeling in the camps, a feeling that was known to preserve one's humanity, is followed by the description of a violent group rape from the point of view of one of the victims. Nevertheless, viewers usually tend to like the video-work and praise the protagonists and the author⁴. *Fresh Cherries* shows a session of *Systemic constellation* (family) therapy, which, according to its founder Bert Hellinger⁵, offers an almost literal possibility to travel back in

² 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 – it was done 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.

³ 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.

⁴ With the only exception know to me: Jaruga R. *KURWY koncentracyjne*, Nie, 42/2010. <http://www.nie.com.pl/art23916.htm>

⁵ 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

time. The participants try to solve their psychological conflicts by positioning themselves in certain ways (that is - *take a position*) forming so called constellations. Each participant takes a position. They seldom talk. The main character – Klara Bielawka, is playing herself, a contemporary actress who is trying to get into a new, difficult role, an actress who is working on a personal issue, she is supposed to play an official concentration camp prostitute (and later a Polish woman raped by Soviet liberator/occupant soldiers during the WWII). There are two hellingerian therapists: a couple, a male and a female and three female assistants - “representatives”, as they are called, who more or less actively contribute to carry on the therapeutic session. We can also see the extravagant and fairly famous in Poland film operator/director - Marcin Koszałka as an actor; there is also a university researcher Joanna Ostrowska who is talking about the hierarchisation of the Nazi concentration camps (KZ)' victims and we can also hear the artist herself, directing behind the camera. Almost from the very beginning we are faced with fragments from an archival film that might appear somehow discontinuous with the rest of the original filming⁶. It is the only existing video document in Poland of the hair cutting punishment inflicted after the WWII on people who were known to maintain intimate relationships with the enemy. However, if one keeps in mind the history of Anna Baumgart's works (many of which focus on the mistreatment of (mainly) the female body), the story of the characters documented in these archival shots is not very much different from the one of the women that Klara is impersonating later in the film. The soundtrack of *Fresh Cherries* is based on a song about the unrequited love interpreted by one of the most popular in-between-wars Polish singer Tadeusz Faliszewski's, that also inspired the name of Baumgart's work.⁷

THE COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

During the film's premiere in *Muranów*, one of the main Warsaw's art cinemas, Baumgart's work provoked a few times hilarious bursts of laughter at least in some viewers, which taking the declared theme of the movie – the taboos, the stigmas and the hierarchy of the victims of the WWII, as well as the processes of shaping the representation of war in the eyes of the younger generation - was to me somehow troubling. Viewers seldom laugh when the film is shown in smaller groups. During the premiere it was triggered by the appearance of two characters that assume a rather comical posture: operator Koszałka and the grotesque hellingerian female therapist. One might think that the humor is not appropriate, or even obscene, in a film that attempts to deal seriously with the fate of KZ' inmates.

In order to understand the use of humor in the context of 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 comedy⁸. However, the humor in Benigni's film is only there for the sake of the 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

⁶ 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, I think, together with the declared effects of *Constellation Therapy* another way in which Baumgart is trying to take us back in time.

⁷ Written by Walery Jarzębiec, music by Zygmunt Białostocki:
<http://teksty.org/tadeusz-faliszewski,szczescie-trzeba-rwac-jak-swieze-wisnie.tekst-piosenki>

⁸ 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.

survival⁹. The viewer is just a passerby, that by pure chance witnesses the almost too exemplary relationship that exists between a father and a son.¹⁰

There is also a significant number of episodes of the animated comedy series *Southpark* that touch on the Holocaust related issues¹¹. Among the four boys, the main characters of the series there are: Kyle Broflovski- a Jewish boy and Eric Cartman who is explicitly anti-Jewish, nevertheless they have kept hanging out together for 15 seasons already. In this case the use of humor frequently mixed with toilet-jokes is more controversial¹². Perhaps what we deal with here is a reflection upon how deeply rooted the Jewish question is in the US popular culture. Or perhaps, its creators, Trey Parker and Matt Stone, are beyond good or evil, being perceived as having a strong autonomous critical point of view that allows them to produce any kind of artistic/critical discourse (except, perhaps, drawing the image of Mohamed). It could also be that Cartman (the chubby one) is usually the one who is punished most of all and usually quite badly in the series from the very first episode, Kyle on the other hand is always fine, and seems to be right in the end of each episode, which probably settles down the account¹³.

Another Holocaust related comic 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 KZ inmate. (Recollect what Bunuel was saying about the film being born in the director's head.) Here the humor is addressed to the inmate himself. His imagination might be what keeps him alive and, perhaps, increases the chances of his survival¹⁴.

The humor can be also used as a tool to aid in trying to spell out facts, usually traumatic and difficult to cope with. As it also happens at another level and in a very different format, for instance, in *Maus*, the visual novel by Art Spiegelman.¹⁵

THE DOGVILLE SETUP

In her film Baumgart uses a similar scenery (black floor on which the nonexistent buildings are painted with thin white lines, with very few props - a set seen as a set). It has been suggested that she did it because Von Trier is one of the directors who constantly brings into the

⁹ 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 newest 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 the Lodz ghetto.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ 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. southparkstudios.com

¹² 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.

¹³ 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

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Although for Daney, cartoons would always be something other than cinema. Worse: something of an enemy. No "beautiful image," especially drawn, would match the emotion - fear and trembling - before recorded things.

cinematic discourse the figure of vulnerable and strongly distressed women¹⁶. Some suggested that Baumgart attempted a homage to Von Trier, others on the contrary claimed that it is a feminist critique of Lars von Trier position – this is if Von Trier is in fact a misogynist and his bringing up the female exploitation topic again and again in his films is a clear proof of this. There are even voices murmuring that Lars von Trier's name was used by Baumgart solely just as an advertising tool to promote *Fresh Cherries*. I think that all this suppositions are wrong.

I would like to think that the “Dogville-inspired set” appeared in Baumgart's film first of all because of Slavoj Žižek, who claims in his *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, that all modern films are ultimately about the possibility or impossibility to make a film. *Dogville* is a film that allegorically deals with the question of believing in Cinema itself. It deals with how to make a film today which a viewer will eventually believe¹⁷. The mysterious thing about watching a film is the fact that even though the viewer knows that 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 the inner life. In a way, naïve belief is undermined, deconstructed through irony, but Von Trier wants to be serious with the magic!, says Žižek. Irony (humor yet again¹⁹) is put into 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 actually is aware of the *structure* of the *set* by putting them into words. For many critics the set is even more abstract/invisible than it really is in *Dogville*.

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 bad behavior. Their response is to either deny the truth of what she has said or to blame Grace herself for tempting them, which is a similar statement to the one expressed in *Fresh Cherries* as well.

Thirdly, Baumgart used the methodology developed by Von Trier as well as the *Systemic Constellation* therapy routine in order to approach a difficult, perhaps an untellable story. It is

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

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.

somehow similar to what I did; when attempting to discuss Baumgart's film I use an already existing methodology - a critical aid developed by the notorious film critic - Serge Daney.

THE TEST

Although it can be applied to any film, the context in which Daney presents his scale is very much comparable 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. On its negative end one finds films like *Kapo*, shot in 1960 by Gillo Pontecorvo. Daney discusses it along the lines of Jacques Rivette's *On Abjection*²¹, in which the author was denouncing Pontecorvo's film. When Daney read the article for the first time it provoked in him both an aesthetic and moral shock and it would determine Daney's fate as a future 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 didn't 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 movement one must—*obviously*—be avert 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 just. In fact, Baumgart addresses this question directly during one of the dialogues between Klara and Marcin (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.

On the other, the good end of his scale, Daney places *Nuit et brouillard (Night and Fog)*, directed by Alain Resnais in 1955. Daney watched on numerous occasions the famous piles of dead bodies, hair, glasses, and teeth. He 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 a 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, nevertheless, this video can be watched again and again, no doubt about that. 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 that were forced to prostitute in order to survive in the KZ brothels - known also as puffs or *Sonderbau*²³, or joy divisions,

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

²² Why not shock the viewer with a scene of group raping like in Elem Klimov' *Come and see?* Even though in *Fresh Cherries* there is a scene, which seem to trigger powerful emotions in the viewers: 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 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

as they are known to the English speaker. In *Night and Fog*, the mentioning of camp brothels is transitory, like a verse. In *Kapo*, the note is more explicit and focuses on a character. Rancier's article was inaccessible to me, so unlike Daney, I had to watch *Kapo* in order to understand his and Rivette's stances and to be able to subscribe to this point of view. To understand what he meant by being asked if *Nuit et brouillard* was a "beautiful" film, to which he answers - 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 beautiful images.

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

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, sublime necrophilia or necrophilia sublimated. On the not so noble side was the possibility of a completely other *jouissance* unable to be sublimated. 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 these 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 that in the domain of sub-culture, the silent claim of an obligatory interlacing of executioners and victims was persisting. Daney was never really upset about the existence of 'concentration camp porn'. He had for these films - just like 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's the other pornography that always revolted him: the 'artistic' pornography of *Kapo* (see *On Abjection* by Jacques Rivette), or a little later, Liliana Cavani's *The Night Porter*, and other retro films of the 70's. 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 wouldn't 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.

So we should not be speaking about amnesia or repression but rather about *foreclosure*, which is 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 mortgaged real property, but the Lacanian definition of it: a hallucinatory return to the real of something

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. (in G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of all*, translation T.A.) Also in this book you 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.

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 axiome. Paradoxically, *Ilse...* 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. To the rather brutal question “Does this watch you?”, it answers - YES. The spectator that Daney was before *Nuit et brouillard* and the filmmaker who tried to show the unrepresentable with this film, were linked by a complicit symmetry. Either it is the spectator who is suddenly ‘missing from his place’ and is stilled while the film continues, or it is 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 this 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 release after WWII²⁵. As long as we know there are no video shootings of the women who were working in puffs. However, in the documentary Hitchcock helped to film, done during the camp's liberation, there is a mentioning about the brothels from Dachau concentration camps, that 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 closeup 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 a brothel. They are only moving images that exist. The discovery was evermore astounding since 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 filmmakers 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 scenes that did not need it. Yet it is not always easy to decide, like Rossellini's films. Where does the event finish? Where is the cruelty? Where does obscenity begin and where does pornography end? He knew these were questions constitutive of the “post-camp” cinema. This cinema had one characteristic: it was *cruel*; the viewers of the time had another:

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.

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

they accepted this cruelty. Cruelty was on the 'good side'. It was cruelty that objected to academic 'illustration' and destroyed the counterfeit sentimentalism of a wordy humanism. An archaic feeling as well since that 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 the 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. Any straight act of cruelty is pornographic, claims Baumgart. No scenes of rape or violation/aggression inside the frames of her film, everything is there by not being filmed.

As for Daney, he remembers the exact moment when he knew that the axiom of "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. If in 1945 the Americans allowed George Stevens to make his astonishing documentary, they didn't broadcast it 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 in that history, *like in any story*, they retained a *right to buy in preference to*, 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 therefore only be in the form of the American docu-drama that this history could escape the cine-clubs and could, via television, concern this servile version of the 'whole of mankind' that is the global TV audience. The simulation- *Holocaust* was certainly no longer confronting the strangeness of a 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 resingularisation. Drawing and not cinema, since it's 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 specimen and its light show of animated police sketches. We had come full circle and we had truly lost.

In *Kapo*, it was still possible to be upset with Pontecorvo for inconsiderately abolishing a distance he should have "kept." The tracking shot was immoral for the simple reason that it was putting us—he as a filmmaker and Daney as a spectator—in a place where they/we did not belong. Where Daney anyway could not and did not want to be, because he 'deported' me from my real situation as a spectator-witness forcing me to be part of the picture. What was the meaning of Godard's formula if not that *one should never put oneself where one isn't 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's just a click on the mouse or the touch pad.

The cinema of terror that European cinefils 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 didn't see any return to the ludic values of yesterday—the small films adored in spite of the entire "Saturday night" cinema. Today the wager of

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

images passes by the violence of media and advertising, a violence which from now on cinema seems to be exempted from²⁷. The strategy of Benetton, reality shows, the Gulf War without images, those are serious things today.

The present for Daney was 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 can't have both the action of the scene *and* the camera movement, you have to choose.

The perfusion of the present. It's the absence of Vichy, the absence of 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 the Straubs' films) then when it doesn't take place, it doesn't 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, unseen. Ten years later *Nuit et Brouillard* returns what wasn't seen, bearing in mind that the images of the camps filmed by George Stevens, or those assembled by Hitchcock, have been stashed away by 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 same people who ordered the images were the same ones to put them aside due to the cold war. Even though they're 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 people, nations and masses, were strictly not seen, in order to be able to return. Daney was afraid that this is not definitive. He remembers meeting Chris Marker in Hong Kong. Marker was excited to learn that the red guards had 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, across slow, difficult and painful processes: it took time to build, 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 human at work. The history of the century, with all its horrors, is also the history of those who have not seen, who have not trusted what they saw, or heard, and that was paid for with millions of dead. That is insufficient, that does not prevent from being mistaken or deluded, but it is good to go back to the argument of a sorrowful Godard when, in *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, he asks: 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?

ON FORECLOSURE

In *On Photography* Susan Sontag, does not describe her experience of seeing pictures taken in the concentration camps as a revelation of absolute knowledge. She does not write that these photographs have given her the complete understanding of the Shoah. For her these photographs were just an opening of the gates of knowledge through a moment of seeing – a negative epiphany, an instance of contemporary revelation. Therefore these images were crucial

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

for the knowledge itself. As was Resnais 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 does not offer neither a miracle nor pause. It is a *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", "knows everything" or "contradicts the"... There is a heavy veil because of the destruction itself, and the destruction of the archives by the Nazi - 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. I believe this video-art work imposes on the viewer a hallucinatory return to the real of something upon which it was impossible to place a "judgment of reality."

CONCLUSION

The motto for this paper was taken from George Didi-Huberman's *Eye of History*. To conclude I will paraphrase here a fragment from another of his books, *The images above all*, that I often cite: Each creation of an image is torn out from the impossibility to describe reality. Especially the artists do not want to surrender to unimaginability, which is obviously experienced when anyone comes into contact with the destruction of person by person. They produce series of images, an editing above all - they know well that disasters are multiplied into infinity... Artists have "reworked" unimaginability 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 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.

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