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Reconstruction or Creation? The Liberation of a Concentration Camp in Andrzej Wajda's *Landscape After Battle*

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Andrzej Wajda's images of spontaneous exuberance captured in the opening scene of *Landscape After Battle* (1970) are used to gauge the realism of his cinematic vision of the liberation. The essay focuses on: reception, critical reviews concerning fidelity to Tadeusz Borowski's short stories, and the filmmaker's declarations in 1969 and two decades later. Other reference materials entail memoirs of American liberators and the photographic record of the liberation of Dachau and its sub-camp Dachau Allach. Wajda has refused to reproduce the actual camp because the horror was unattainable for the crew. Thus, the film should be placed in the realm of creation rather than meticulous reconstruction.

INTRODUCTION

Critical discourses on the plausibility of Holocaust representation typically concentrate on the use of minimalistic style and meticulous reconstruction. Such an idea has gained significant currency in the realm of literary studies with critics such as Berel Lang calling for the rejection of literary devices in accounts of the genocidal past.[1] It seems fitting to analyse Andrzej Wajda's *Landscape After Battle* in order to bring discussions on what constitutes a 'genuine' cinematographic representation of the camps into sharper focus. The director has been dealing with the topic of the Holocaust for over forty years, starting with an episode in his debut movie *Generation* (1954), followed by *Samson* (1961), *Landscape After Battle* (1970), *Korczak* (1990), and *Holy Week* (1996). *Landscape After Battle* is, however, the only film that penetrates the concentrationary universe, even if only at its dusk.[2]

Landscape After Battle is an adaptation of Tadeusz Borowski's short stories, including 'Bitwa pod Grunwaldem',[3] covering the transition from incarceration in

[1] Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[2] The term 'concentrationary universe' was coined by David Rousset in his book *L'Universe Concentrationaire* (Paris: Minuit, 1965) in order to describe the system of Nazi concentration camps, based on his incarceration at Buchenwald. It has to be noted that Auschwitz-Birkenau combined the functions of a concentration camp and an extermination centre, and the commemoration of the latter encountered political obstacles in communist Poland. See: Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana żałoba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady* 1944-1950 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2009), pp. 238-52; and Jonathan D. Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration*, 1945-1979 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003). The original camps in Germany, such as Dachau, were not bent on systematic annihilation, but the living conditions led to high mortality. Christian Goeschel, 'Before Auschwitz. The Formation of the Nazi Concentration Camps', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (2010), 515-34). The final days of the war exacerbated the situation of the inmates, leaving masses to die from hunger or disease.

[3] Apart from 'Bitwa pod Grunwaldem', scenes from the following short stories were adapted for the film: 'Milczenie' (Silence), 'Kolacja' (Supper), 'Koniec wojny' (End of the War), and 'Independence

the Dachau Allach sub-camp to a displaced persons (DP) camp in Germany. Even though Borowski made his mark describing the collapse of Western ethical values in Auschwitz, his knowledge of the concentration camp system was not limited to the infamous 'capital of the Holocaust'.[4] Auschwitz is the benchmark of totalitarian violence, but the corruption of moral life is perceivable at other sites of oppression. In the final months of the war, masses of prisoners were sent westward by train or in death marches, discovering the systematic nature of totalitarian exploitation. The author of 'This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen' scrutinizes the aftermath of incarceration, probing the depths of the damage done to society and individuals. The formal features of Borowski's fiction, such as first person narration and the use of the first name Tadek, create the impression that the short stories are an autobiographical account of the camps. However, even though his prose stems from experience and observation, it remains a literary work.

The film opens with a group portrait of mainly Polish inmates being liberated at an unnamed concentration camp by the American military, and then it moves on to an analysis of the reconstruction of the social fabric upon transfer to a DP camp. The liberated seem to overlook the magnitude of the catastrophe and proceed to resurrect the prewar value system to the dismay of the main protagonist Tadek, a disillusioned humanist whose faith in the integrity of European humanism has been shattered. Two pillars of the prewar social system, namely religion and the military, reignite conflicts from the past, which have been put to rest only for the brief moment of the liberation. The DPs prepare a *tableau vivant* of the famous painting 'Battle of Grunwald' by Jan Matejko (depicting the victory of the Polish king Jagiełło over the Teutonic Knights on 10 July 1410) – graphic proof that all but die-hard communists (like Tadek) crave traditional values such as chivalry and providence. Tadek falls for a Jewish survivor, Nina. Unfortunately, the possibility of developing a relationship is cut short when an American guard accidentally shoots the girl. Harbouring no illusions as to the moral superiority of the West, Tadek packs up his belongings and sets off on a journey back to communist Poland.

What are the topics broached in the other films? *Samson* is an adaptation of a novel of the same title by Kazimierz Brandys, narrating the story of a Jewish protagonist nicknamed Samson. The winding path of fate takes him from a spell of imprisonment for the accidental killing of a Polish student during an anti-Semitic demonstration in the late 1930s to his heroic death in the ruins of a clandestine printing house in occupied Warsaw. Despite Wajda's use of rich visual symbolism the film fell short of critics' and audiences' expectations.[5] Korczak is based on Janusz

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Day'.

[4] Peter Hayes, 'Auschwitz, the Capital of the Holocaust', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 17 (2003), pp. 330-50.

[5] For an analysis of the Polish reception compare: Janina Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda, History, Politics, and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 83-85. While Polish critics were mostly negative about the impact of the film, influencing the opinion of the general public, it found some admirers in the West. Kazimierz Brandys saw the reasons for unfavourable responses in the film's failure to win any prizes at the Venice festival (Andrzej Wajda, *Filmy*, vol. 1, ed. by Jerzy Płażewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1996), pp. 110, 114-15.

Korczak's writings from the Warsaw ghetto. Agnieszka Holland's screenplay is interwoven with a few episodes from Korczak's diary. The film stirred up controversy due to its heterogeneous representational strategy; it merged a black-and-white paradocumentary style with a fable-like hagiography of its main protagonist. Critics attacked the film for the 'false' ending, in which children from Korczak's orphanage leave a rail car (which has been miraculously uncoupled from the train heading for Treblinka in August 1942) and run to their freedom with the 'Old Doctor'. It has to be stressed that the ending does not disguise itself in realistic garb but is conspicuously different from the rest of the film.[6] *Holy Week* was yet another adaptation of a literary text: Jerzy Andrzejewski's novella of the same title. It touches upon the choices of prewar Polish and Polish-Jewish intelligentsia. A Jewish woman sheltered by Malecki, her boyfriend before the war and now the husband of an expecting Polish wife, falls prey to the hostility of a coarsely anti-Semitic housekeeper, Piotrowska. Eventually, Irena chooses death among other Jews in the burning ghetto during the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Unfortunately, this television production did not live up to the standards of Wajda's other films.

FILM REALISM AND THE CAMPS

Running the inherent risk of oversimplification, the postwar cinematographic representations of the Holocaust in Poland can be divided into two groups: paradocumentary realism of the type of Wanda Jakubowska's *Last Stage* (1948) and the psychological realism of Andrzej Munk's *Passenger* (1963). Both might be accused of the falsification of the image of history. *Last Stage* is an example of ideological cinema in which the documentary component is designed to enhance persuasion,[7] whereas in the latter retrospections of an SS-guard, Liza, abound in self-serving lies. Even though Jewish suffering during the war does not take centre stage in Wajda's film, it is justifiable to classify *Landscape After Battle* as concentrationary cinema[8] with elements of Holocaust cinema (understood here as an inquiry into the aftermath of genocide). Furthermore, the gruesome details of the extermination surface in Tadek's anecdote – told to an American soldier – about a friend from the Jewish

[6] Critics influenced by Claude Lanzmann were at the forefront of the attacks on the film. For a more nuanced perspective and a critical take on the '*Korczak* scandal' see: Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Wajda Problem', *Salmagundi*, 92 (1991), pp. 29-35.

[7] Krzysztof Kornacki, *Kino polskie wobec katolicyzmu* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), pp. 51-53; and Marta Wróbel, '*Ostatni* etap Wandy Jakubowskiej jako pierwszy etap polskiego kina ideologicznego', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, 43 (2003), 6-21. Other motivations for the representation of camp existence in Jakubowska's work have been pointed out by Agnieszka Morstin--Popławska who stresses that films produced in the immediate aftermath of the war had therapeutic intentions - 'Zrozumieć sens zapamiętanego. Wybrane aspekty ukazywania przeszłości w kinie polskim lat 90', in *Kino polskie wczoraj i dziś. Kino polskie po roku* 1989, ed. by Piotr Zwierzchowski and Daria Mazur (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2007), pp. 14-16.

[8] For this category see: *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais*' Night and Fog (1955), ed. by Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011); and Stuart Liebman, 'Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*: Historians Reassess a Classic Documentary', *Cineaste*, 38 (2012), 46-49.

Sonderkommando in Auschwitz having cremated his father's body upon his asphyxiation in the gas chamber. Polish cinematic representations of Auschwitz frequently zero in on its primary function as a concentration camp, with immediate extermination at Birkenau represented as a background to stories of resistance (*The Last Stage*, Jakubowska's *Koniec naszego świata*, *Passenger*) or the everyday life of prisoners (*Leszek Wosiewicz*, *Kornblumenblau* – 1988). With the exception of Janusz Morgenstern's *Ambulance* (a 1961 short film showing the preparations for the killing of a group of children and their supervisor in a gas van), murder in the industrialized killing centres was not a pivotal topic of Polish films. Highlighting Jewish suffering was hardly a priority for the Communist system; nationality, and not ethnicity served to commemorate the victims in Auschwitz (e.g. Hungarian Jews would be commemorated as citizens of Hungary).[9]

Typically, the line between cinematographic fiction and documentary is drawn with reference to staging.[10] Regardless of its representational goals, cinematographic emplotment inevitably entails a translation of a linguistic image of the world, a narrative in words, into a story in images relying on the rhythm of camera work and editing. Even the so-called objective, documentary types of filmmaking are not devoid of the technological framework of film art. Moreover, the category of 'film realism' is a received one, and it refers to historically fluctuating modes of representing reality.

> The term's general use implicitly compares a filmic representation of something with an external reality: a film is realistic because it accurately reproduces that part of the 'real' world to which it refers. Much critical energy has been spent disputing that such an idea has any validity at all.[11]

As is made evident by the above quote, film theory has rendered the study of film realism obsolete, delegating it to the realm of popular film criticism. Nevertheless, within studies on Holocaust representations the very category has held sway due to a conviction that severing the connection of images or narratives with their historical context constitutes aesthetic trespassing. Recently, there has been a surge of interest in the realistic in the field of Holocaust studies, tying it, among other subjects, to trauma studies. Even though Michael Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism*[12] addresses the topic of realism chiefly in the context of literary studies, it makes a brief foray into film studies in the discussion of Steven Spielberg's excessive reconstruction in *Schindler's List*. Staging in the film is juxtaposed with the aesthetic purity of Claude Lanzmann's endeavour in *Shoah*. The notion of 'excessive realism' is perceptible in Jean-Luc Godard's vehement attack on Spielberg's encounter with the Holocaust in

[9] Huener, *Auschwitz*.
[10] On staging in relation to the Holocaust film see: Dana Renga, 'Staging Memory and Trauma in French and Italian Holocaust Film', *Romanic Review*, 97 (2006), 461-82.
[11] Steve Blanford, Barry Keith Grant, Jim Hillier, *The Film Studies Dictionary* (London: Arnold Publishers, 2001), 195.
[12] Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism. The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Schindler's List on the grounds that it is an event defying recreation.[13] Joshua Hirsch, tracing the tradition of post-traumatic cinema, credits Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* with the invention of the genre of post-traumatic documentary, based on Sergei Eisenstein's theory of realism achieved through the montage of archive and postwar material.[14] Another seminal image of the concentrationary past, Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* has been discussed as an example of forging a documentary-like aesthetic at the expense of the true horror of the camp.[15] It seems fitting to conclude this brief overview with Aaron Kerner's observation that the 'realistic imperative' discernible in the majority of Holocaust films is based on the category of 'the reality effect' devised by Roland Barthes. The critic underscores the allegiance to certain narrative conventions and not to the 'raw' historical reality out there.[16]

I am under the impression that the discussion of 'Realism' or 'Reconstruction' as a critical practice predated Lanzmann's obsessive renunciation of visual reconstruction in representations of the genocide. Wajda's take on the concentrationary universe calls for a critical archeology situating *Landscape After Battle* in relation to other films by the director.

Posing a question about the representational status of Andrzej Wajda's film image prompts reference to the critics of his oeuvre who situate him in the realm of creation and not realistic rendering.[17] Searching for references to film[18] or artistic[19]

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[13] Duncan Wheeler, 'Godard's List: Why Spielberg and Auschwitz Are Number One', *Media History*, 15 (2009), pp. 185-203 (p. 187).

[14] Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage. Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), p. 52-53. Recently, Hirsch extended his discussion of the genre to other cultural contexts beyond the Eurocentric experience of the Holocaust. See: Joshua Hirsch, 'Afterimages. Post-Holocaust, Posttraumatic, and Postcolonial Cinemas', *Arcadia – International Journal for Literary Studies*, 45 (2010), 406-427. Hirsch proposes a genealogy of realism and its morphing into a traumatic one.

[15] Marek Haltof, 'Return to Auschwitz: Wanda Jakubowska's *The Last Stage* (1948)', *The Polish Review*, 55.1 (2010), 7-34. This omission did not escape the scrutiny of the former inmates (p. 17). For a discussion of the genre of docudrama in Jakubowska's film see: Hanno Loewy, 'The Mother of All Holocaust Films?: Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz Trilogy', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 24 (2004), 179-204.

[16] *Film and the Holocaust. New Perspectives on Dramas, Documentaries, and Experimental Films* (New York: Continuum, 2011), p. 17.

[17] See: Mirosław Przylipiak, 'Refleksja nad dokumentalizmem w filmach fabularnych Andrzeja Wajdy', in *Kino polskie: reinterpretacje. Historia – ideologia – polityka*, ed. by Konrad Klejsa and Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Rabid, 2008), pp. 97-118. Przylipiak focuses attention on Wajda's distrust of documentary filmmaking and the director's preoccupation with creation (at times at odds with the local topography as in *Man of Iron*) as a method of addressing reality.

[18] Alicja Helman seeks references to other films and artistic trends, which shaped the aesthetic landscape of the 'Polish school', pointing amongst others to inspirations connected with Italian neo-realism and expressionism. 'Kilka refleksji o inspiracjach stylistycznych "szkoły polskiej"', in *Kino polskie*, pp. 61-76.

[19] Dariusz Chyb, 'Malarstwo w filmach Andrzeja Wajdy. "Krajobraz po bitwie"', *Kino*, 10 (1988), 24-28. Wajda became indebted to Andrzej Wróblewski (a painter whose prominence in the postwar art world in Poland was due to a series of paintings of executions entitled 'Rozstrzelanie' (Shooting) because critics compared him to Tadeusz Borowski. Overwhelmed by Wróblewski's sheer talent Wajda dropped out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków to embrace film art in order to develop ideas borrowed from his colleague. Paul Coates, 'Wajda's Imagination of Disaster: War Trauma, Surrealism and Kitsch', in *The Cinema of Andrzej Wajda. The Art of Irony and Defiance*, ed. by John Orr

inspirations of the director of *Ashes and Diamonds* is yet another type of critical endeavor.

The relationship between the past (or, to be correct, representations of it made at the time of the events or in postwar memoirs) and cinematographic representation in Wajda's film calls for a multi-tier study. The present analysis shall commence with a comparison of Wajda's filmic vision and the liberation of Dachau and its sub-camp Dachau Allach. Then I will move on to the critical responses (with special emphasis on the assessment of realism) concerning, among other things, fidelity to the literary source. These observations will be juxtaposed with declarations made by Wajda during the production of the film and two decades later. Finally, in the 1960s the concept of historical reconstruction underwent a sea-change: the validity of meticulous re-enactment was questioned in favour of simpler, paradocumentary filmmaking and the practice of representing the past lent itself to allegorization. These heterogeneous criteria reflect divergent modes of representation of the past, whereas comparison to Tadeusz Borowski's fiction is justified by Wajda's choice. Moreover, recognition for 'This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen' and other short stories also hit the nail on the head as depictions of the camp.[20]

WAJDA'S LIBERATION OF A CONCENTRATION CAMP VS. THE ACTUAL LIBERATION OF DACHAU

It is time for an analysis of the veracity of Wajda's depiction of the liberation. The opening scene of *Landscape After Battle* is of key importance for the present analysis. It constitutes a choreographic fantasy of the liberation. The setting is dominated by elements of camp scenery – barbed wire fences and wooden barracks within the perimeter of which we observe prisoners dumbfounded at the disappearance of the guards. Initial distrust turns to ubiquitous joy replacing earlier, mostly political, animosities among the inmates. It does not take long for the American soldiers to appear; their commander pleads for them to refrain from lynching the former tormentors. The liberated wait for the American officer to leave the barrack so that they can unleash their vengeance by drowning a former guard in a mud hole. Compulsive eating that brings about indigestion is another characteristic element of the liberation. How are these images related to the liberation of the camps in 1945?[21] The scope of the present text calls for focus on two camps: Dachau and its sub-camp,

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and Elzbieta Ostrowska (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), pp. 15-29 (p. 17).

[20] Early controversies surrounding Auschwitz short stories faded by the 1960s, and initial resistance had subsided. At the outset, nationalist-minded literary critics had blamed Borowski for his allegedly morally unacceptable behavior in the camp and had tried to salvage the myth of Polish inmates who had not sunk to the bottom of camp life. Sławomir Buryła, 'Na antypodach tradycji literackiej. Wokół "sprawy Borowskiego"', in Prawda mitu i literatury. O pisarstwie Tadeusza Borowskiego i Leopolda Buczkowskiego (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Universitas, 2003), pp. 24-69.

[21] The political climate in the Eastern Bloc precluded any unhindered commemoration of the liberation of camps in the east. See: Anita Kondoyanidi, 'The Liberating Experience: War Correspondents, Red Army Soldiers, and the Nazi Extermination Camps', *The Russian Review*, 69 (2010), pp. 438-462.

Dachau-Allach, since that is where Tadeusz Borowski was liberated. Liberators' accounts are an invaluable source of knowledge about the conditions in the liberated camps in Germany. American or British soldiers recorded the 'landscape after battle' with cameras (the photographs were taken by professional photographers and amateurs alike[22]), and towards the end of their lives in written memoirs. Documentary films edited from the footage produced by the military are another type of representation.[23]

Joe Sacco – one of the liberators of Dachau – provides an account, which focuses on the reactions of the prisoners toward freedom brought by the liberators and the phenomenon of revenge. This choice is not a haphazard one, as it reflects the events presented in the film adaptation of Borowski's 'Battle of Grunwald':

> Inside were row after row of squalid, dilapidated barracks, out of which were slowly and reluctantly emerging fearful prisoners. […] The inmates had apparently not understood what was happening during the first thirty minutes or so after we took over the camp. Now they were beginning to realize that we were the good guys and they had been liberated. Some of them began yelling and shouting. The cheers of the few soon grew to become a deafening roar throughout the camp. These are the ones we save, I thought as chills ran through my body.
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> They were crowding together, reaching through the fences, wanting to touch us. They looked like the walking dead, like they were too frail to stand or reach or even smile. Yet in their parched voices we heard jubilation, and in their sunken eyes we saw the joyful glimmers of resurrected hope. They were laughing, crying, singing, holding their arms high in the air, embracing each other while looking at us in disbelief, almost unable to grasp that their day of liberation, their exodus, was at hand.[24]

The Americans were so burdened with the magnitude of the crimes they witnessed that they executed the members of the camp's SS.[25] The soldiers left one of the guards to the fury of the liberated:

> [T]he male prisoners swarmed him, kicking, hitting, and cursing. One came up from behind carrying a piece of wood and began to pummel the Nazi, who tried desperately and futilely to protect his head with his arms. Once he lost consciousness, the man with the stick backed off, and the others, now joined by women and children, went into a frenzy, each landing blow

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[22] The role of liberation photography as a means of propagating knowledge about crimes was addressed by Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Janina Struk *Photographing the Holocaust. Interpretation of the Evidence* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004). The ethical dimension of these photographs and their function in the culture of memory was sketched by Cornelia Brink in 'Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps', *History and Memory*, 12.1 (2000), pp. 135-150.

[23] Compare: *Memory of the Camps* (dir. Sidney Bernstein, 1945) and *Night and Fog* (dir. Alain Resnais, 1955.) In Poland a similar function was played by Aleksander Ford's documentary on the Majdanek camp (1944).

[24] Jack Sacco, *Where the Birds Never Sing. The True Story of the 92nd Signal Battalion and the Liberation of Dachau* (New York: Regan Books, 2003), p. 280. Joe Sacco's son prepared this wartime story for publication, and the book was subsequently nominated for Pulitzer Prize in 2004.

[25] For the circumstances of the almost total liquidation of the SS and Waffen SS see: Howard A. Buechner, *Dachau: The Hour of the Avenger (An Eyewitness Account*) (Metairie, LA: Thunderbird Press, 1986). The book reproduces photographs of the SS being machine-gunned, and a guard lying on the ground about to be beaten to death with a shovel by a former inmate.

> after blow, each kicking, crying and exacting their revenge. The bedlam continued for several minutes, until all had their requital. Finally some of the men came forward with heavy metal rods the infantrymen had given them and made sure he was dead.[26]

While Wajda and Borowski portray the Americans as a force to preclude such retaliation by the prisoners, their attempts are nevertheless futile. However, realistic emplotment is hardly devoid of explicit or implicit moral judgment. Borowski and the American soldiers are of two views about the liberation. For Sacco, Dachau was a watershed event in his perception of the war: 'And so it was here, in this place abandoned by God and accursed by men, that we came to discover the meaning of our mission'.[27] For the liberators, their military effort was unequivocally just without moral compromises. Borowski does not concur with such an unqualified assessment of the moral significance of the liberation. Sławomir Buryła points to 'a continuity between the world of the Lager and the one after it is seen perhaps most clearly in the sphere of interpersonal relationships. From the DP camp to ordinary life, the executioner-victim relationship persists in the postwar existence'.[28] The two visions rest upon incongruous perceptions of continuity – the Americans see themselves as agents for the restoration of the prewar moral order whereas Borowski blames that very order for the crimes committed in the camps.[29] Therefore, the liberation is not a genuine liberation but merely a subjection to a new power (for the DPs quarantined in the camp) or a reconstruction of oppressive power sanctioned by the values of European culture. Such an opinion is brought forth despite the undeniable change in the existential situation of the prisoners after the end of the war. On the other hand, the American military leadership was not blind to this shift in power.[30]

The liberation scene was shot on the grounds of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum with the remains of the wooden barracks in Birkenau clearly visible in the background (with their wooden structures gone, only brick chimneys are left pointing to the sky). The identification of the place poses no difficulty to anyone familiar with the site or its photographic documentation. This choice is by no means surprising as the Museum had been the setting for numerous film productions.[31] Making use of this location, apart from the obvious advantages (e.g. instantaneous recognition of the camp by the audience or its 'prototypical', in cognitivist terms, status for the iconography of crime), has a number of disadvantages. It raises doubts as to the identity of the liberators,[32] shifts the date of the liberation back to January

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[26] Sacco, p. 283.
[27] Sacco, p. 289.
[28] Buryła, pp. 114-15.
[29] Such a Baumanesque diagnosis of post-totalitarian condition is pointed to by Buryła who analyzes the axiological dimension of Borowski's short stories.
[30] In a report sent to President Harry S. Truman in August 1945, Earl G. Harrison complained about the treatment of former prisoners for whom the liberation did not mean the end of confinement. Scott Christianson, *The Last Gasp. The Rise and Fall of the American Gas Chamber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 164.
[31] It suffices to mention Wanda Jakubowska's *Last Stage* (1948) and *Koniec naszego świata* (The End of Our World) (1964), Andrzej Munk's *Passenger* (1963) or Jerzy Ziarnik's *Wycieczka w nieznane* (Trip into the Unknown) (1968.)
[32] Krystyna Korvin Przybylska mentions the 'liberation of Auschwitz': 'elongated sequence of

1945, and is at odds with the archival materials.[33] Some of the doubts are dispelled when the American soldiers appear. The image of the campgrounds covered with snow does not differ from what the liberators saw in Dachau on 29 April. On the other hand, the snow-covered landscape is ripe with symbolic meaning, especially when one listens to the music of Antonio Vivaldi's Four Seasons accompanying the opening scene. In the cosmic order it signifies a shift from winter to spring, that is, reinstating 'the natural world order'. Such a juxtaposition of image and sound can also be perceived as the aesthetization of the liberation by virtue of which Wajda avoided showing disturbing images known from photographic and cinematographic iconography. Instead, Wajda resorted to the rendering of the liberation as a rite of passage. His avoidance of the most horrific images stems from taking the sensitivity of the audience into consideration. They might reject a far-fetched reenactment, or it may have been done due to the moral ambiguity of a reconstruction of the radically transgressive post-concentrationary landscape. The problem of the visual verisimilitude comes to the fore in relation to the appearance of the actors. Not one is emaciated, none are on the brink of descending into the abyss of a Muselmann.[34] On the other hand, some of the liberation photographs from Dachau and Dachau-Allach documented ex-prisoners in striped uniforms enthusiastically cheering the liberators. These photographs are devoid of the 'spontaneity' of *Landscape After Battle*. They are staged, and the prisoners stand on their own. And yet, there was no uniform experience of the end of the war, and thus a need arises to study Wajda's choices. Marcus J. Smith, a radiologist dispatched to Dachau to assess the health of the prisoners, wrote about Survivors on the verge of death whose portrayal is absent from the film: 'Some try to smile, but emaciated, sallow faces do not convey emotions. The feelings are there, however. Some of the inmates come over and touch us; others, too weak to stand, wave their hands feebly; others weep'.[35]

Wajda's images are further corroborated by archival footage unknown to the director at the time of production. George Stevens recorded colour footage of the camp a few days after the overthrow of the Nazi oppressors. His cameraman shot the post-liberation disarray between 2 and 7 May 1945 – the corpses of prisoners lying on flatcars covered with a layer of snow, the bodies of former guards with their faces disfigured in violent retribution, and the piled up bodies of prisoners. The images of the survivors are visual precedents for *Landscape After Battle*. This similarity derives from two technical sources: colour and the lack of location sound. Furthermore, Wajda struck the right chord in the scenes of prisoners gulping down food. Despite the fact that some survivors strove to smile to the camera, others had impenetrable facial expressions. The American cameraman did not omit the

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prisoners in striped uniforms being released from Auschwitz after the liberation of the camp by the liberating forces'. 'An Interview with Andrzej Wajda', *Literature and Film Quarterly* 5.1 (1977), pp. 2-16 (p. 3).

[33] The liberated Auschwitz--Birkenau was recorded by Alexander Vorontsov and edited as *The Liberation of Auschwitz*.

[34] Although spared that condition in Auschwitz, Tadeusz Borowski was liberated weighing a scant 35 kilograms. See: Tadeusz Drewnowski, *Ucieczka z kamiennego świata. O Tadeuszu Borowskim* (Warszawa: PIW, 1992), p. 94.

[35] *Dachau: the Harrowing of Hell* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), p. 89.

reconstruction of prewar social customs. A nondescript person was addressing a group of the DPs and a uniformed rabbi was praying.[36] This raw footage had been confined to the archives and resurfaced recently, e.g. in the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The uplifting narratives of the American liberators have been criticized by some of the survivors, the most eloquent being Primo Levi. The writer warns against the uncritical acceptance of a stereotypical image of the liberation (popularized by literature and art, and adopted by film): ' The disease runs its course and health returns. To deliver us from imprisonment 'our boys', the liberators, arrive just in time, with waving flags […]'.[37] The author of *Survival in Auschwitz* deconstructs the myth of joyous liberation summoning accounts of other survivors:

> In the majority of cases, the hour of liberation was neither joyous nor lighthearted. For most it occurred against a tragic background of destruction, slaughter, and suffering. […] Leaving pain behind was a delight for only a few fortunate beings, or only for a few instants, or for very simple souls; almost always it coincided with a phase of anguish.[38]

The writer does not rule out the joyous response to the liberation admitting that 'there are among us those who have the virtue and privilege of extracting, isolating those instants of happiness, of enjoying them fully, as though they were extracting pure gold from dross'.[39] He summons two contrasting accounts of the end of the torment: Filip Müller's and his own. Müller recalls that he felt no joy: 'This moment, on which all my thought and secret wishes had been concentrated for three years, evoked neither gladness nor, for that matter, any other feelings inside me',[40] whereas Levi underscores the shame of the Soviet soldiers at Auschwitz-Birkenau upon witnessing the camp. The author of *If This is a Man* cannot be treated as a historian of the liberation of Auschwitz, but has had an ambition to arrive at a philosophical analysis of this breaking down of the gates to hell. In the essay entitled 'Shame', the site of his liberation is less important for him than making a psychological diagnosis.

The stereotype of the liberation debunked by Levi is hardly a product of the imagination of artists. The images are clearly staged. In the photographs of Dachau-Allach[41] taken on 30 April, the ex-prisoners are cheering their liberators. The barbed wire fence cuts through the group and in one photograph they have climbed the stairs and onto the platform of a guard tower. It suffices to mention the image of an American soldier distributing cigarettes through a fence made of birch poles. In

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[36] An unedited reel of footage from Dachau is catalogued at the USHMM as story RG-60.0661. The same footage was also edited into clips. An additional reel shows the American soldiers around the camp.

[37] 'Shame', in *Art from the Ashes. A Holocaust Anthology*, ed. by Lawrence Langer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.108-18 (p. 108).

[38] Levi, p. 108.

[39] Levi, p. 109.

[40] Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz. Three Years in the Gas Chambers*, literary collaboration by Helmut Freitag, ed. and trans. by Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), p. 171.

[41] The USHMM provides access to the photographs through a search engine with the use of key words: http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/search/ph_catalog.php#search. Compare the photographs with call numbers: #18145, #49653, #74599 and #71051.

Arland B. Musser's photograph the soldier is separated from the liberated. Some of the ex-prisoners are leaning on top of the fence extending their arms towards Colonel Larry Mutinsk, while the presence of others is only signaled by their hands stretching between the poles. The composition of the image draws attention to the gesture of the soldier – the low-angle shot places his hands in the centre of the photograph. A trained photojournalist conversant with photographic conventions took these photographs. The liberated are aware of the picture taking and consciously participate in the shoot. It is a far cry from the images of horror taken in Dachau with death trains filled to the brim with corpses. An unknown photographer left an even more conspicuous imprint on images of Dachau in an illustration of the operation of the crematorium oven taken on 4 May. In it, two prisoners are standing on both sides of an emaciated corpse stretched out on a rack.[42] Such an explanatory dramatization was buttressed by the authority of the eye-witnesses.

FILM CRITICS AND REALISM IN LANDSCAPE AFTER BATTLE

Let me turn to a few analyses of the film's verisimilitude put forward by critics after its release in 1970. They predominantly measured the film in terms of its literary source. Reviewers for film did not speak in unison about the sources of Wajda's creation. Andrzej Braun refused to see the situation of the DPs as the main topic but claimed instead that 'the film is about Borowski, about Tadek from Auschwitz'.[43] He also noted that the director's intentions fell short of being achieved. And yet, Wajda was successful in showing the self-definition and adaptation of new Poles into a new life.[44] Braun fell prey to the mistake common among literary critics in Poland, that is, he conflated Tadek – the literary creation – with Borowski. Andrzej Werner steered clear of this fallacy as he noted that, first, the artistic goals of the director and the writer clashed and, second, Tadek in the film was based on the popular views on Borowski in the camp: 'Olbrychski's creation […] has nothing to do with Tadek (vorarbeiter)'.[45] That is by no means a comprehensive list of the differences between the literary text and its film adaptation: 'Borowski asks about the sources of evil and the present moment, Wajda, when seen from this perspective, about the impact of evil past.'[46] Such a genealogy of representation compiled by Werner demonstrates how far Wajda's visual imagination departed from the literary prototype. And yet, such a betrayal of the original vision had its advocates: 'It was said that Wajda, in adapting Tadeusz Borowski's "Battle of Grunwald", treated the original so arbitrarily that he completely changed its tenor. Thank God! A lethally sick account of reality was healed with poetic life.'[47] Therefore, it is justifiable to use Alicja

[42] Compare the photograph with the call number: #15026.
[43] 'Krajobraz po bitwie', *Film*, 37 (1970), 4-5 (p. 5).
[44] Braun, p. 5.
[45] 'Krajobraz po bitwie z … Borowskim', *Film*, 38 (1970), 6-7 (p. 7).
[46] Werner, p. 7.
[47] Zbigniew Mentzel, 'Krajobraz po bitwie. Przewodnik po filmach Andrzeja Wajdy', *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 5 (January 30, 2000), p. 8.

Helman's phrase that *Landscape After Battle* is a 'creative betrayal'.[48]

These reviews make evident that the quality of the film adaptation was not assessed by means of its allegiance to the literary prototype. The reviews corroborate my intuition that the opening scene is a highly aestheticized imagining of the end of the war indispensable for the construction of the plot. The 'missing' images of ubiquitous horror indicate that the evil and horror remain within the survivors.[49] Moreover, such a reconstruction would be dubious in the light of the ethics of representation. Wajda made an about-face in his approach to that dilemma in *Korczak* where collecting corpses from the streets of the Warsaw ghetto is illustrated with German archive materials.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

No less interesting are Wajda's declarations twenty years after the production of the film, in which he described the point of departure for the new aesthetics engendered by the radical novum of war experiences: 'new books had to be written and new films made. But can our experiences be expressed in art at all? Is art capable of carrying the burden of rendering such destruction?'[50] What is more, the director underscored the need for cultural responsibility regarding the fallen, which bestowed on him and his peers an intimacy with catastrophic history: 'Maybe it's an apt description: death forgot about us. But by leaving us alive assigned a duty, that is, commemorating those who died.'[51] The comparison of the above-mentioned with Wajda's pronouncements during the production of the film is invaluable in tracing the return of memory after the fall of communism in Poland. In 1969 Wajda undermined the significance of the topic: 'Only a love story can save the film. Is there anybody still interested in camp stories?'.[52] In a similar vein, Agnieszka Holland dubbed the concentration camp topic a cliché, which she strived to avoid in her *Bitter Harvest*.[50]

Two fragments of Wajda's interview are pertinent to the present discussion. The director explains the reasons for leaving out sound in the opening scene of the film. In his view representations of the camp can be either 'realistic' or 'unrealistic'. He chose the latter:

> But the image doesn't seek realism at all. Its power lies in its being in the fog, being concrete,

[48] *Twórcza zdrada. Filmowe adaptacje literatury* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Ars Nova, 1998.)
[49] Julian Levinson recognises an analogous process in the context of American cinema: 'The Maimed Body and Tortured Soul: Holocaust Survivors in American Film', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 17.1 (2004), 141-160
[50] 'Moje notatki z historii,' *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, 15-16 (1996-97), 7-21 (p. 13). In his recollections the director underlines the role of luck in shaping life stories: 'The fates of the boys in *Canal*, Tadeusz in *Landscape after Battle*, Marcin in *Ring with the Crowned Eagle* and Maciek Chełmicki in *Ashes and Diamonds* could have been my part. I was simply lucky.' (p. 10)
[51] Wajda, 'Moje … ', p. 9
[52] Stanisław Janicki, 'Cztery rozmowy z Andrzejem Wajdą', *Kino*, 5 (1970), 18-29 (p. 24).
[50] Joanna K. Stimmel, 'Between Globalization and Particularization of Memories. Screen Images of the Holocaust in Germany and Poland', *German Politics and Society*, 76 (2005), 83-105 (p. 89).

> real, and at the same time seen from a distance. I didn't want to photograph Auschwitz as I don't believe in the possibility of making a true film about it. There are no such skinny, emaciated people.[51]

The archival images are the benchmark of the truth of the image and the emaciation indispensable in such a reconstruction is nowhere to be found. The visual becomes a tool of distinguishing between the bodily aftermath of traumatic abuse (or deprivation) and the more abstract inner workings of the camp. Appearances have been replaced with behaviour. Furthermore, the reconstructed concentration camp was not moulded on any specific place but instead became a prototype of the camp: 'I was interested in a foreshortening of the camp, hence the repeated image of the barracks and wires.'[52] The filming of Auschwitz in snow proved a blessing for the crew as the director was desperately looking for a way to visually differentiate one camp from the other. In his opinion, the camp was filmed under a snow blanket for the first time (apparently, he was oblivious to the Soviet liberation film). The use of Vivaldi's music was not premeditated, as it was the only score available during the editing. Bolesław Michałek's review of *Landscape After Battle* draws attention to the contradictory sources of the scene:

> The sequence of the liberation of the camp […] resembles a ballet or pantomime but is truly realistic. A seemingly uncoordinated commotion of striped uniforms behind the barbed wire, on the snow: a synthetic image of a state of the spirit: elation, but also helplessness and anxiety.[53]

Another scene sheds light on Wajda's use of props. In the DP camp, Tadeusz shows a group of American soldiers a crematorium. Anna German, playing one of the Americans, refused to be filmed in Auschwitz. The director chose the appearance of the actress over making use of the original site. He expounds on his decision by referencing Borowski's worldview:

> What is a crematorium? A normal oven but instead of bread or rolls they put people inside. That's how Borowski saw it. An oven is an oven, it is important what you do with it. Why do we have to go to Auschwitz? We found a big oven in Warsaw.[54]

This example proves that the artistic goal can be fulfilled in a plethora of ways. Additionally, the use of original props is not an end in itself, as mundane objects can emulate them. In the opening sequence, their symbolism is severed from the topographic context. What is more, Alfred Rudnicki's formulation, 'The Epoch of Crematoria' (*epoka pieców*) was used metaphorically to cover the period of Nazi crimes in Poland.[55] Thus, an image of an oven suffices to evoke the industrialized

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51 Janicki, p. 28.

52 Ibid., 28.

53 'Film o miłości film o polskości', *Kino*, 6 (1970), 14-19 (p. 17).

54 Janicki, p. 26.

55 For a discussion of Rudnicki's work see: Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, 'Alfred Rudnicki', in *Holocaust Literature. An Encyclopedia of Writers and Their Work*, vol. II, ed. by S. Lillian Kremer (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1058-62.

process of body disposal perfected in the camps and by extension, the magnitude of crimes performed there. As a result of commemoration in the Eastern Bloc, the crematorium oven has become associated with the systematic extermination, even though the Aktion Reinhard killing centres did not employ them[56]. Numerous camps in Germany had their own crematoria despite the fact that their primary task did not include extermination.

Wajda denies having moulded Tadek on Borowski:

> 'I wouldn't even consider that. Otherwise I'd have had to take a small, brawny, strong boy. I wouldn't have benefited from it, all the more because beyond his circle of friends, Borowski's appearance remains unknown.'[57]

This very description fails to characterize the writer at the moment of his liberation.[58] Instead Tadek was bestowed with Andrzej Wróblewski's 'spite, a strong sense of irony, and internal conflict'.[59] Such a substitution is not tantamount to a 'lie'. Hayden White points to the category of the 'typical' employed in representations of historical events in film: 'The veracity of the scene depends on the depiction of a person whose historical significance derived from the kind of act he performed at a particular time and place'.[60]

CINEMATIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CAMPS IN THE 1960S AND THE STATUS OF THE PAST

Polish filmmaking in the 1960s was given a crucial pedagogical function in the historical policy concerning the commemoration of the martyrological past. This phenomenon had two unexpected outcomes: criticism of too much re-enactment at the cost of losing 'true' experience and the allegorization of the past. Fiction in this decade did not shy away from giving a critical analysis of post-concentrationary cinematography, e.g. Andrzej Brycht's[61] literary reportage from the film shoot at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.[62] Brycht's literary colleagues including

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[56] Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka saw the disposal of disinterred corpses on pyres in open pits.
[57] Janicki, p. 23.
[58] 'This sweater had an undeniable advantage, its bulky shape hid the sporty and athletic body of my young friend.' Andrzej Wajda, *Filmy*, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1996), p. 232.
[59] Wajda, *Filmy*, p. 232.
[60] 'Historiography and Historiophoty', *The American Historical Review* 93 (1988), 1193-99 (p. 1198). White refers to Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982) in which a train conductor's face was shown even though Gandhi's autobiography provided no clue as to his appearance.
[61] Andrzej Brycht took the literary scene in Poland by storm in the mid-1960s publishing short stories, which bemoaned consumptionism and lack of respect for the martyrological history of twentieth-century Poland he perceived in the 'decade of small stabilization'. Two short stories have been turned into films: *Wycieczka w nieznane* (1967 - Trip into the Unknown, dir. by Jerzy Ziarnik) and *Dancing w kwaterze Hitlera* (1968 - Dancing at Hitler's Headquarters, dir. by Jan Batory). After a brief but spectacular career the writer emigrated to the West. Now his literary works are all but forgotten.
[62] Brycht witnessed the realization of Wanda Jakubowska's *Koniec naszego świata,* see: Andrzej Chąciński, 'Życie Andrzeja Brychta', *Życie* (17 May 2001) <http://niniwa2.cba.pl/brycht.htm>

Stanisław Grochowiak question the viability of a high budget staging, proposing instead a paradocumentary recording (purportedly devoid of the filmmaker's intervention) of the room of a female Stubendienst [63]:

> Camera, […] one old camera and a good operator, and to place the camera in the room of the Stubendienst, fixed in one place, motionless. Take two actors, and twenty extras and that's it. And our film will shake the world, will tell more about Birkenau than any crowd scenes in the mud, uproar and treading down, with artificial clubs.[64]

The narrator is ultimately bored of 'nonsense' about 'realism and surrealism, creation, the idea of film and its philosophy'.[65] He denies film the status of art because of its collective character by stating, 'what art can be created by thirty people'.[66] If we were to ignore the highly confrontational tone of Brycht's prose, the gravity of the problem would become evident. At the end of the 1960s after a series of more or less successful visual reconstructions of camp life, the writer undermines the viability of a meticulous reconstruction of the scenery behind the barbed wire. Thus, the truth about the camp cannot be equated with the accuracy of reconstruction (guaranteed among others by the former prisoners employed as experts by the film crew). The effect achieved by Wajda lies between two extremes. On the one hand, the reconstruction is legitimized by its setting at Auschwitz (even though the camp is standing in for a nondescript camp in Germany) and on the other, veristic recreation was sacrificed for the 'other' truth.

The problem of realistic representation deserves reconsideration for another reason. John Orr proposes that *Landscape After Battle* can be interpreted not as an image of immediate postwar reality, but rather as an artist's declaration about contemporary issues.[67] Therefore, the film, which could be construed as 'a Marxist parody of Polish tradition and Western capitalism', is also 'a mirror image of […] the crude itic patriotism in communist Poland of 1969 with Soviet soldiers watching on'.[68] Orr claims that Wajda used 'a doubled narrative that takes a radical approach to history all the while using material seen as the stuff of documentary to forge an anti-naturalistic film.'[69] According to Orr, this strategy brings Wajda's work closer to other films produced at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s, which treated the past not only as immediacy but also as a phantasmagoria. Historical narrative was not to be 'costume-drama nor docudrama but […] reverie, a dreamed past relived at the contingent moment of the present'.[70] Orr explores the hidden

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[accessed 30 March 2010].

[63] Name of the function in a barrack

[64] 'Wycieczka Auschwitz-Birkenau', in *Dancing w kwaterze Hitlera* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1969), p. 45.

[65] Brycht, p. 45.

[66] Brycht, p. 45.

[67] See: 'At the Crossroads: Irony and Defiance in the Films of Andrzej Wajda', in *The Cinema*, pp. 1-15 (pp. 8-11).

[68] Orr, p. 9.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

meaning of the narrative in *Landscape After Battle* claiming that the protagonists, Tadek and Nina are survivors of the 1968 Polish student revolt exiled in the wake of the anti-Semitic purge orchestrated by Mieczysław Moczar. By going one step further and applying the same logic to the opening scene, it could be read as a 'true' liberation. Freedom for Poles would be a godsend and retroactively legitimized by the Western allies. In this risky reading the phantasmatic character of the images would no longer puzzle, as their compensatory function would become evident. In other words, that was the image of the liberation from the West, which failed to materialize.

CONCLUSIONS

In summation, Wajda is an advocate of film avoiding the recreation of concrete images. Therefore, the point of comparison with the historical liberation is moot. And yet, Wajda's fantasies about the liberation are steeped in the aura of the concentrationary universe. Primary sources provide an opportunity to elaborate on the 'myth' of the liberation or the rite of passage that leads from totalitarianism to freedom. The director took the liberty of using artistic license in shaping the visuals. Is there a more general 'truth' Wajda aspired to convey? For him the moment of the liberation is a liminal one. All the social barriers dating back to prewar times disappear and the prisoners are united in meting out revenge. Additionally, the director decided to take a third path, straying from the choices made by Jakubowska and Munk. Endowing the film with images of iconic campness[71] opens up the possibility of reading it as a political allegory straying from the concrete historical circumstances.

Realism as an aesthetic category belongs to the given critical vocabulary, and yet, the meaning of the term falls short of being unequivocal; the director declares a break with this type of representation whereas some critics praise him for being faithful to it. Moreover, with the passage of time, the repertoire of the available reference material is expanding – the accounts of the liberators and documentary photographs were not accessible during the production of the film. Therefore, the problem stated in the title by and large belongs to the sphere of reception as the audience assesses the probability of representation in accordance with their knowledge/imagination of the past. Finally, the term did not disappear from the vocabulary of filmmakers, which Agnieszka Holland admitted in an interview about her drama *In Darkness*:

> I wanted to make a film that is more realistic, as realistic as possible. Which is why, for example, we shot the film in six languages, because that was the reality of that place in that time.[72]

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[71] Campness is an abstract quality of any concentration camp in existence. It does not describe any particular camp.

[72] <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/toronto-2011-agnieszka-holland-says-233745> [accessed 4 January 2012]. Due to space constraints I cannot elaborate on Holland's film, but the place

of reconstruction in current cinematic practice requires further analysis. Quentin Tarantino in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), which is more of a revenge fantasy than a historical film, effectively downplays the validity of the problem of realism. Another case worthy of consideration would be Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008), in which a fairy tale about friendship under extreme circumstances of the death camp is coupled with an emphasis on the historical accuracy of German uniforms (as evidenced by an interview with the film's costume designer in the additional materials on the DVD).