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# View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

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Introduction to the thematic issue on the visibility and invisibility of violence. The photograph on the cover of the issue presenting Anna Barlik's sculpture – the spatial form into which a bloodstain congealed – serves as the starting point.

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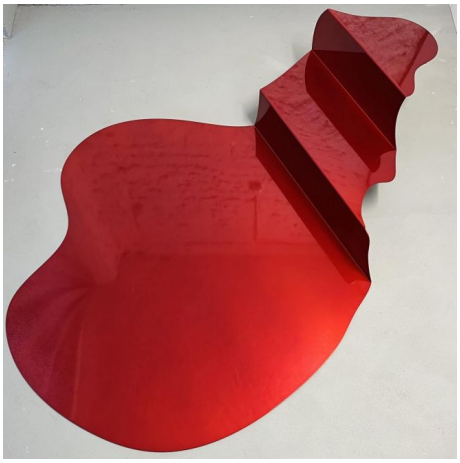
# The Visibility and Invisibility of Violence



Anna Barlik, *Anomaly 1 - Stairs*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Our cover presents Anna Barlik's work *Anomaly I - Stairs*, a steel object powder-coated red, in which an orderly staircase pattern emerges from an indefinite, fluid shape. The formless merges here with the symmetrical, chaos overflows into order, and the relationship between one state and another that constitutes the anomaly is subject to a tangible consideration. Importantly, this is a sculpture that requires space, allowing one to look at it from many points of view at the same time as escapeing the impulse of unambiguous definition. It is a biomorphic form that not only spills its shape into the rhythm of the staircase, but is associated with the body. When we look at the work from a certain perspective we have no doubt - we are looking at a staircase and blood spilling down it. As Barlik states in the description of the work: "The stairs are a silent witness to accidents, deaths and ordinary stumbles. Falling and Pain. Stairs are a simple tale of violence."[1] *Anomaly I - Stairs* poignantly reveals our disbelief. As an abstract, aesthetically appealing form, it obscures that which it materializes. Barlik poses the question of what traces violence leaves behind, not only in the body of the victim, but also in the space in which it takes place. Do these traces allow us to reconstruct and see the act of violence after the fact, even in the face of the silence of a victim or a witness? Are they something that can be obliterated, thus removing the violence from the realm of representation, or, on the contrary, as Eyal Weizman postulates in the project of forensic architecture, does seeing the traces of violence depend

only on the sensitivity of our eye?[2]

What matters in this story of violence is how easily it escapes the gaze. It can be seen and not seen at the same time. This tension between the possibility of looking at violence and the impossibility of seeing violence, or even overlooking it, is the theme of the 36th issue of View.

In her book *On Violence, On Violence Against Women*, published in 2021, Jacquline Rose states:

> "When I made violence against women my main theme, I could never have predicted the cruel shape it would assume under the weight of Covid-19. Although more men than women worldwide are dying from the virus, violence against women has dramatically intensified, a 'shadow pandemic' according to one UN report, or even a new 'femicide.'"[3]

The reasons for such a strong connection between the pandemic and the rise of violence against women can be found in the radical withdrawal of public institutions from managing social relations and living reduced to domestic life. As Amber Peterman, Alina Potts, Megan O'Donnell, Kelly Thompson, Niyati Shah, Sabine Oertelt-Prigione and Nicole van Galder show in their study *Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children*, nine identifiable pathways leading to violence: (1) economic insecurity and poverty-related stress, (2) quarantines and social isolation, (3) disaster and conflict-related unrest and instability, (4) exposure to exploitative relationships due to changing demographics, (5) reduced health service availability and access to first responders, (6) inability of women to temporarily escape abusive partners, (7) virus-specific sources of violence, (8) exposure to violence and coercion in response efforts, and (9) violence perpetrated against health care workers, are all closely linked to changing relationships between the public and domestic spheres.[4] Importantly, these findings confirm previous research

on the link between the financial crisis and domestic violence.[5]

Jacqueline Rose, referring to Hannah Arendt, concludes that the home is even where violence is born. Reaching back to ancient Greece, Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, indicates that politics and the public sphere emerge as a means for men to escape from domesticity. Male citizens discuss and vote instead of killing each other. At home, however, towards women, children and slaves, they remain oppressors. According to Arendt, this entails a strong rejection of bodily perspective and its associated physiology. Bodies are subject to physical violence, citizens are not. In Rose's book, women and trans people reclaim their corporeality in a complex and ambiguous relationship with violence, which, although unequivocally condemned as an element of public life, remains an integral component of the experience of the body.[6] By analyzing the prose of Roxane Gay, Eimear McBride or the trial of Oscar Pistorius, Rose opens up a perspective on violence that makes us watch instead of erase, analyze instead of repress, see instead of not look.

The theory of Randall Collins, cited in Waldemar Rapior's text, which examines visual materials as part of a microsociology of violence, is similarly based on focused and insightful looking. Photographs, films, both documentary and fictional, surveillance footage and so on, help Collins to trace the path from emotion to reaction. Analyzing the abundance of visual material in *Violence. A Micro-Sociological Theory*, he reconstructs violent events as if they were theatrical scenes - happening over time within discernible sequences and in a demarcatable space. This framing of violence as something that is actually mediated is central to Collins' concept and methodology. One can put it even more strongly: violence can only be understood and analyzed, defined or recognized, through the act of mediation. Therefore, the interactional model of violence requires recording, reconstruction and observation. Reconstruction involves recreating, "acting out" the situation, especially in the case of

events that occurred in the distant past. It has a systematizing value, making it possible to analyze how certain elements of interaction condition each other in the act of violence. Emotions play a key role here, affecting social interactions and thus determining the nature of conflicts, giving them strength, but also determining how they are extinguished. Collins states: "violence are subtypes within one of the main pathways around confrontational tension and fear."[7] No one is predisposed to violence, rather it is these pathways, specific situations, that lead to the outbreak of violence, to break the tension and fear, to launch an attack. With this very popular theory, the dialectic of seeing and not seeing violence can be formulated in yet another way. As an interaction, an act embedded in a social context and a dramatically unfolding situation. Violence – although captured in recordings and photographs – is not neutralized in the image. It continues to act, subject to reconstruction in the body and in the imagination. Like the reverberation invoked by Carrie Noland in this issue, the violence happening between social actors reverberates with an incessant echo, enabling the image to become a reproduction of it instead of a document.

While some forms of violence, such as domestic violence or sexual violence, are relegated to the register of invisibility, the public sphere remains saturated with other images of violence. Today, in particular, images of war and its related cruelty dominate the visual sphere. While their presence has simply become part of our everyday reality, which is difficult to question, this condition has a genealogy that dates back to the second half of the 20th century, when images of war crimes were permanently introduced into the media. After 1945, when the unprecedented nature of Nazi crimes was to be presented to the public, it was images, mostly photographs and films, though also artworks, that began to function in public space as not only representations of the violence of war and the Holocaust,

but also as court-recognized evidence of the crimes committed. "It must be seen to be believed,"[8] wrote a New York Times war correspondent in 1944 after visiting the Majdanek camp. This turning point in the understanding and status of the role of images is symbolized by American architect Dan Kiely's placement of a projection screen in the center of the Nuremberg courtroom where the famous trials of war criminals began in November 1945. As Chrstian Delage writes, the films that were shot during the liberation of the concentration camps were put on the witness stand for the first time.[9] These images, however, were not merely neutral documentation, but employed a particular poetics that aimed not only at credible representations of the crimes, but also at the affective engagement of the viewer achieved through reference to the existing iconography of violence and suffering. These images, which collectively came to be known as "atrocity photographs," were decades later subjected to criticism that pointed to their ineffectiveness. As Barbie Zelizer wrote, the public display of drastic images of violence and mass and dehumanized death did not prevent further genocides, but paradoxically made such violence tame.[10] Moreover, mediations of violence centered on cruelty objectified victims. The reworking and critique of these strategies of representation, most clearly articulated by Susan Sontag in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, became foundational for rethinking modes of representation that would no longer repeat violence by instrumentalizing the suffering of the victims, but which would place their experience at the center. An attempt to build an alternative way of looking at the violence of war through the montage of hitherto unexplored visual archives is discussed in an interview with Anna Dunczyk-Szulc and Agnieszka Kajczyk, authors of the book *Anthology of Views. The Warsaw Ghetto - photographs and films*.

Numerous studies on contemporary images of armed conflict indicate that the hyper-visibility of the violence of war is marked

by a paradox. As Jon Simons and John Louis Lucaites point out in their book *In/Visible War: The Culture of War in Twenty-First-Century America*, war is both hyper-visible and invisible because the dynamics of representations of the violence of war externalize it, creating the impression that war and violence are always taking place somewhere else, predominantly outside Western power centers.[11] As the example of media representations of the "war on terror" shows, even when countries in the global North are in an actual state of war, violence is depicted as a happening mostly elsewhere.

With its title, Anna Barlik's work, perhaps unexpectedly, evokes another important dimension of violence. René Girard, arguably the most famous anthropologist of violence, who was, importantly, actually a historian, analyzed the persecutory stereotypes he discovered as the common foundation of all cultures and wrote: "In all the vocabulary of tribal or national prejudices hatred is expressed, not for difference, but for its absence. It is not the other nomos that is seen in the other, but anomaly [...]."[12] As Girard states, the obsession of the persecutors is not difference, but its obliteration, a threatening reminder of the common condition. In the cultural scenario described by the researcher, the experience of loss of difference, of *differentiation* as he calls it, is to be remedied by a scapegoat. The abnormal, chosen on the basis of a sacrificial stereotype, persecuted in the name of the crowd, born thanks to him and towards him. If one looks at anomaly from this angle, it reveals a fact important to Girard - the blurring of the distinction between the individual and the community. A similar relation is delineated by Sarah Kane, the most famous British playwright of the so-called New Brutalism of the 1990s, who rewrote and significantly complicated the figure of the scapegoat. In her first drama *Bombed*, rape in a hotel room becomes identical with wartime violence.[13] One is the source of the other. Blood spills down the stairs, flowing in the home and in public, in image

and in life, in myth and in historical account, in distant times and here and now before our eyes. Violence radically shortens the distance between self and other, between then and now, between there and here.

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This issue the section **CloseUp** opens with Carrie Noland's text *Reverberating Violence, Visibility, and the Dance of Rachid Ouramdane,* an analysis of the French-Algerian artist's choreographic strategies. As a practitioner of documentary dance, Ouramdane uses the testimonies of torture victims and their families to create dance. In two works that focus on torture, 2008's *Loin* and 2009's *Des Témoins ordinaires*, the artist raises questions about the limits of acts of violence. Showing how the corporeal "afterimage" of torture works in Ouramdane's practice, Noland proposes the category of reverberation, a movement that resonates with trauma rather than mimetically recreating it. In a subsequent text, *Looking After the Dead. The Collective Gaze*, Janice Yu examines the collective gaze of witnesses to racist violence using photographs from Emmett Till's funeral and footage capturing the death of George Floyd as examples. Starting from the premise that omitting the gaze that unites a group experiencing violence in favor of looking at individual suffering and victims is an extension of the act of violence, the author proposes a formula for looking as care for the dead: looking after the dead, restoring the agency of a black community experiencing racism. Waldemar Rapior in the text *Mobilizowanie i relatywizowanie przemocy. Interakcyjny wymiar przemocy w stojącej przed dylematem moralnym grupie, w której pozycja żadnej osoby nie jest uprzywilejowana* [Mobilizing and Relativizing Violence. The interactive dimension of violence in a group facing a moral dilemma, in which the position of no individual is privileged], describes the results of a research

experiment conducted with the help of theatrical means and with the participation of director Wojtek Ziemilski and performer Sean. A group of respondents is supposed to make decisions together as to Sean's next actions. When all the possibilities presented are acts of variously understood violence against the performer: going out without clothes in the cold, posting a disagreeable post on his Facebook, being slapped by one of the spectator-participants, the group process reveals ways of dealing with violence. Using the perspective of Collins' microsociology of violence, rooted in Goffman's interactionism, the author analyzes the situation, showing how violence is socially mobilized and relativized in order to preserve the order of interactions. The section closes with a Polish translation of an excerpt from French philosopher Elsa Dorlin's book *Se d éfendre. La philosophie du violence*, which analyzes Helen Zahavi's novel *A Miserable Weekend* and the computer game *Hey baby!* created by Suyin Looui. At the center of Dorlin's text is the idea and practice of self-defense as a technique for establishing subjectivity. In contrast to necessary defense, rooted in the logic of citizenship's prioritization of subjectivity, self-defense has the potential to transcend the law and produce a new social order. In the excerpt presented here, Drolin also places his considerations in the context of visibility and invisibility, invoking the category of anamnesis to describe the a way of acts of violence operate visually.

**Viewpoint** presents collages by Lia Dostileva centered on her series *In Your Region Even the Mountains Are False* and other works that directly touch on the artist's memories and experiences of growing up in Donetsk, a place marked by both the violence of Soviet industrialization and the Russian invasion. Artist’s collages juxtapose elements of her personal geography. The childhood-remembered slag mountains that make up Donetsk's urban landscape are depicted both as traces of colonial exploitation of natural resources written into the city's

fabric, and as nostalgic afterimages of childhood associated with a city that is impossible to return to due to the ongoing war since 2014. The artist's works map complex and disparate relationships to a place marked by a specific kind of violence, which, following Rob Nixon, can be called "slow violence," or "the violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space."[14] The term, mostly applied to environmental destruction, describes violence as a long-term process whose effects are dispersed over time and build up over years, like the post-industrial slag heaps that the artist closely examines.

The **Perspectives** section consists of two conversations. In the text titled *It Is the Spectacle of Violence that Matters There*, Natalia Judzinska and Inga Hajdarowicz talk with Elizabeth Dunn, an anthropologist best known in Poland for her book *Privatizing Poland. Baby Food, Big Business and the Remaking of Labor*, and research on the migration crisis and violence on the Polish-Belarusian border. As the authors write: "Almost fifteen years after the book was published, Dunn returned to Poland with her thoughtful commentaries. In her polemic with the American left, searching for excuses for the Russian invasion in the expansion of NATO and Russia's political and economic "humiliation," she points out the hypocrisy of that intellectual circle, which fails to notice Russian imperialism. She arrived at the Polish–Ukrainian border at the beginning of March 2022, once again getting involved on the ground, this time to explore the bottom-up approach to refugee response." The conversation is an insightful and annotated reflection on violence that gives its spectacular character to political gestures and covers up the fate of victims. The second conversation conducted by Katarzyna Bojarska with Anna Duńczyk-Szulc and Agnieszka Kajczyk - editors of the aforementioned volume *Anthology of Views. The Warsaw Ghetto - photographs and films*, points to the importance of visual testimony of life in the context of, and against, violence. As in the text by Janice Yu, here too the

importance of the collective gaze captured in photographs and visual materials is revealed to the authors. The context they seek gives a completely new meaning to looking at the ghetto and changes the way the story is told.

The **Panorama** section opens with Lukasz Kielpinski's text *Gra o sumie zerowej. Ekonomia wstydu w filmie Pora na czarownice* [Zero-sum game. The Economics of Shame in the Film 'Season for Witches'], which addresses the representation of socially excluded groups in Piotr Lazarkiewicz's eponymous 1993 film. The text places the film in the broader context of representation and discussion of the HIV epidemic in Poland, showing how discourse on the virus overlapped with the social and ideological polarization of the transition period. The author problematizes the representational strategies of *Pora na Czarownice* [Season for Witches], showing how the film's emancipatory message seeking to destigmatize people with HIV merged with stereotypical representations of people protesting in front of Monar centers (a Polish organization providing help for people with substance abuse issues as well HIV positive people], inscribing this ambivalence into the dynamics of public discourse in the 1990s. The text *Polscy i iraccy artyści w Bagdadzie, czyli peryferyjne kapitały kulturowe i negocjowanie modernizmu* [Polish and Iraqi Artists in Baghdad, or Peripheral Cultural Capitals and the Negotiation of Modernism] by Max Cegielski, meanwhile, presents a hitherto little-known and researched episode of art history from the period of World War II, when displaced artists from the Anders Army, headed by Jozef Czapski, established artistic contacts with important representatives of Iraqi modernism such as Javad Salim. Exploring their joint projects and relationships, Cegielski problematizes the notion of peripheral modernism by inscribing it in discussions of colonialism.

Finally, in **Snapshots** we publish a review of the collective publication *Nekroprzemoc. Polityka, kultura i umarli*

[Necroviolence. Politics, Culture and the Dead] edited by Jakub Orzeszek and Stanislaw Rosek. In the text, Wiktoria Tabak relates the contents of the book to the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border, which makes the review an interesting double-voice alongside the conversation with Elisabeth Dunn. Next, a text by Krzysztof Świrek presents the author's interpretation of the output of Kenneth Anger, who died in May 2023. Anger's cinema, which turns against the naiveté of looking, entering into alliances with anachronistic media, satisfies itself with the goal of immunizing the viewer against the "deadly power of the image." As the author concludes, "According to the rules of magical imagination, the director proposed a homeopathic treatment: one should look into the eyes of the visual fetish and the dark icon of death, recognize their power and learn to control them." The whole issue closes with Peter Verstraten's text *Time Is Not on Our Side: Reading "Solaris mon amour,"* an analysis of the film by Kuba Mirkuda mentioned in the title, pointing to its intertextual, deeply dialogical, character. Between the film Hiroshima mon amour, Stanisław Lem's text Solaris, and also its radio and film adaptations, Mikurda's film shifts through abundant archival materials, creating a profound reflection on the experience of trauma.

From violence that reveals itself as a reverberation in the acting body, to collective and interactional perspectives on violence, to self-defense, this issue of *View* offers possible theoretical accounts of the violence that defines the condition of human and nonhuman bodies, intimate landscapes and public territories, times of crisis and war. In the rupture between visibility and invisibility, we attempt to establish a point of view that allows us to analyze representations of violence without reproducing it. Like Anna Barlik's cover *Anomaly*, the constellation of topics and texts proposed in this issue invites us to see differently and, in the disruption of the image, look at what

provokes us to close our eyes.

1 Anna Barlik, *Anomaly I - Stairs*, https://annabarlik.com/anomalies [accessed 13.10.2023].

2 Zob. Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability*, Zone Books, New York 2015.

3 Jacquline Rose, *On Violence, On Violence Against Women*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, London 2021, 159/207[ebook].

4 Amber Peterman et al, *Pandemics and Violence Against Women and Children*, Working Paper 528, Center for Global Development, https://www.cgdev.org/publication/pandemics-and-violence-against-women-and-children [accessed 13.10.2013].

5 Zob. na przykład Sylvia Walby, *Crisis*, Polity, Cambridge 2015.

6 Zob. Hannah Arendt, *Kondycja ludzka*, przeł. A. Łagodzka,. Wydawnictwo Altheia, Warsaw 2010.

7 Randall Collins, *Violence. A Micro-Sociological Theory.* Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008, 16/427 [ebook].

8 *Nazi Mass Killing Laid Bare in a Camp*, "The New York Times", 30.08.1944, 1.

9 Christian Delage, *Caught on Camera Film in the Courtroom from the Nuremberg Trials to the Trials of the Khmer Rouge*, Filadelfia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. 62.

10 Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to forget : Holocaust memory through the camera's eye,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

11 Jon Simons, John Louis Lucaites, *In/visible War: The Culture of War in Twenty-first-Century America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017.

12 René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1986, 22.

13 Aleks Sierz, In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today, Faber, London 2001, 100-101.

14 Rob Nixon, Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011, 2.