

# Kwartalnik **filmowy**

Special Issue 2013

I N S T Y T U T S Z T U K I P A N



## POLISH FILM SCHOLARS ON POLISH CINEMA

**NEW INTERPRETATIONS:** PAULINA KWIATKOWSKA The images of space-time in Andrzej Munk's film *Passenger*; RAFAŁ MARSZAŁEK A bodiless enemy; SEBASTIAN JAGIELSKI Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land* as a buddy film; TADEUSZ LUBELSKI Lithuanian kin. The birth of adaptation out of the spirit of community; MONIKA MASZEWSKA-ŁUPINIAK Autobiographical discourse in Andrzej Żuławski's *The Third Part of the Night*; AGNIESZKA MORSTIN Theories of kitsch and *The Double Life of Veronique* by Krzysztof Kieślowski • **TOWARDS THE DOCUMENTARY:** TOMASZ ŁYSAK Dariusz Jabłoński's *Photographer*; MIKOŁAJ JAZDON On Polish iconographic films made from photos; SEBASTIAN LISZKA On Marcin Koszałka's and Jerzy Nowak's *Being*; BEATA KOŚCIŃSKA-KRIPPNER Documentary telenovela, or docu-soap Polish style • **SIGNS OF TIME – IN SEARCH OF FORM:** ANNA TASZYCKA *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson as a portmanteau film; MARCIN GIŻYCKI Graphics, photography and film in Polish Constructivism; JACEK ŚWIDZIŃSKI Video performance *From My Window* by Józef Robakowski; MARCIN MARON Realism in films of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety; KAROLINA KOŚCIŃSKA Accounts and memories of women from the Warsaw Uprising as ready-made but not used film scenarios; GRZEGORZ NADGRODKIEWICZ, EWA CISZEWSKA, JADWIGA MOSTOWSKA Three voices on the *Ode to Joy*

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Cover photo: *The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)



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**FILMOTEKA NARODOWA**

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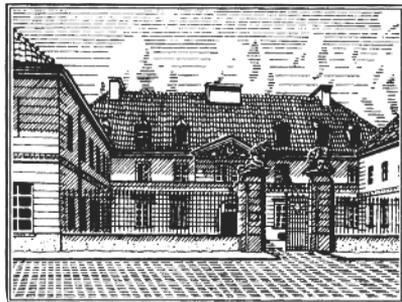
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# Kwartalnik filmowy

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, FILM AND AUDIOVISUAL ARTS  
INSTITUTE OF ART OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



Institute of Art  
Polish Academy of Sciences

Special Issue 2013

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## EDITORIAL

The first special issue of “Kwartalnik Filmowy” in English was prepared in the framework of the “National Programme for the Development of the Humanities”. We would like to treat this publication as an opportunity to share internationally the noteworthy research tendencies in Polish film studies concerning our national cinema, to indicate interesting phenomena in this cinema, and to present “Kwartalnik Filmowy” as an important, nationally unique field of reflection on film, which encompasses all academic centres of film research in Poland.

The first section is devoted to new interpretations of Polish film masterpieces. It is said that every generation writes its own history of the cinema. Thanks to temporal distance, these works can be liberated from their old circumstantial political and cultural contexts, so that new values can be found in them. Paulina Kwiatkowska performs a sophisticated formal analysis of Andrzej Munk’s *Passenger*, referring to the concept of space-time and to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the chronotope in order to reveal the protagonist’s subjective perspective. Rafał Marszałek points out a certain surprising feature of films of the Polish school, namely that in the case of German perpetrators in uniforms filmmakers refrain from concrete character figurations for the sake of visual generalisation and symbolism; the author of the paper interprets this a result of a deep war trauma. As seen by Sebastian Jagielski, Andrzej Wajda’s *The Promised Land* is a buddy film – due to the complex, homo-social relationship of the main protagonists. In the essay by Tadeusz Lubelski, Tadeusz Konwicki’s film adaptations of literary works are discussed as an evocation of the spirit of the cultural, emotional and axiological rather than national community. Monika Maszewska-Lupiniak’s text talks about the autobiographical aspects of *The Third Part of the Night* by Andrzej Żuławski. Agnieszka Morstin offers a reflection on Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *The Double Life of Veronique*, radically counter to the previous, well-established readings of his work.

Today, Polish documentary cinema is sometimes more exploratory than fiction cinema. This is testified by papers presented in section two of the present volume. Tomasz Łysak treats Dariusz Jabłoński’s *Photographer* as a point of departure for posing questions about truth in the documentary and in photography, in relation to the Holocaust. Also Mikołaj Jazdon’s essay refers to photography as a documentary material employed in film. Using the example of Marcin Koszałka’s *Being*, Sebastian Liszka takes up the question of creational and conceptual values of the documentary film. Beata Kosińska-Krippner writes about the devaluation of documentary genres due to tendencies present in the mass culture of television.

The last section of the present volume is devoted to experimental tendencies and explorations in search of a new language in film. Anna Taszycka writes about the works of a pair of extraordinary Polish artists, Franciszka and Stefan Themerson, and Marcin Giżycki about the use of graphics, film and photography in the art of the Constructivists. Jacek Świdziński recalls the innovative explorations of Józef Robakowski, who registered the transformations of Polish reality in an offbeat way. Marcin Maron investigates the features of the characteristic Aesopian realistic convention in the cinema of moral anxiety, seeing it as a vehicle of value systems. Karolina Kosińska’s text refers to another paradox – that of non-representation – and points out the absence of women’s narratives in Polish war films. Finally, Grzegorz Nadgrodkiewicz, Ewa Ciszewska and Jadwiga Mostowska write about *Ode to Joy* by Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa and Maciej Migas, treating it as an example of a significant new tendency in Polish cinema after the political breakthrough of 1989.

For us, the electronic issue of “Kwartalnik Filmowy” is also an important experiment and an attempt to reach a wider audience. We count on your feedback and hope for a fruitful dialogue and other forms of cooperation.

The Editorial Staff of “Kwartalnik Filmowy”

# NEW INTERPRETATIONS



*The Third Part of the Night*, dir. Andrzej Żuławski (1971)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

# The Structures of Memory

The images of space-time  
in Andrzej Munk's film *Passenger*

PAULINA KWIATKOWSKA

The film *Passenger*, directed by Andrzej Munk, is not the first or the last artistic interpretation of Zofia Posmysz's text written in 1959 for Polish Radio, where she worked at the time. The radio drama *Pasażerka z kabiny 45* (*Passenger from Cabin number 45*), was broadcast that same year, and met with great critical acclaim. The writer was asked to make the text available to the newly established Polish Television theatre studio. It was Andrzej Munk who directed the play transmitted on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1960. It is now hard to tell if by then Munk had already planned to adapt Zofia Posmysz's text for the cinema, or whether the idea came to him slightly later. What we know for sure is that in 1961 he asked the writer to prepare a film script based on earlier versions of the *Passenger* text. The screenplay was finally made in collaboration with Munk, and transformed into a shooting script by him and his closest colleagues.

Filming began in 1961, with the contemporary story set on a luxury cruise liner "Batory". Then the entire film crew moved to Auschwitz, the location of the retrospective part of the film, which was set in the camp. Only studio pictures were left out, since on the 20<sup>th</sup> September 1961 Andrzej Munk died in a car crash, whilst driving to Lodz to collect set designs for the indoor shooting. Exactly two years later, on the anniversary of death, the premiere of his last film took place. During those two years, Munk's colleagues, friends, and the entire "Kamera" film crew, made great efforts to ensure the *Passenger* material was not left on the shelf. The last shots in Auschwitz, and those in the studio, were shot immediately after his death, with the help of his co-director, Andrzej Brzozowski, based on the shooting script, as well as conversations with Munk, which the team had fresh in mind. However, the contemporary part of the story remained an open issue; Munk was for many reasons dissatisfied with the footage from "Batory", and intended to redo it, starting with the script. After his death, the responsibility for making a decision about the final shape of the contemporary scenes, without which the film's structure would be incoherent, fell on Witold Lesiewicz, who undertook to complete the film. Together with Wiktor Woroszyński, the author of the voice-over, they created the final formal conception of the *Passenger*; according to which the contemporary action taking place on the liner is only suggested by still photos selected from the material shot by Munk.

After the film's premiere, doubts were voiced as to whether, in the shape in which it was shown to the public, it could still be considered as one with the author's original work. My thoughts are based on the belief that the footage shot during Munk's lifetime, and what the team did after his death, should not be considered

separately. Instead, we ought to accept that these original pictures prompted his colleagues to such a reprocessing, and these artistic and emotional modifications are part of the immanent value of the film. Seen from this perspective, the problem of its “incompleteness”, so obstinately recurring in critical reviews of the *Passenger*, does not cease to exist, but instead takes on a positive meaning. It does not prevent further discussions about the movie; on the contrary, it helps to develop them simultaneously in different directions, and enriches seemingly empty parts of the film, in which we can find a wealth of meaning. Being aware of this “incompleteness” and accepting it ultimately leads to a more daring approach to this work. The boldness lies not in the “finishing off” of the film, but rather in understanding the “unfinishable”.

Essentially, the *Passenger* appears to have an extremely complicated film structure, which in short consists of an open plot, which can be traced back to the script, and includes the pictures shot during Munk’s lifetime, the pictures shot after his death, and based on the screenplay, the form his colleagues gave to the film at the editing stage, and what Woroszyński called “the value of destruction”. For me, it is precisely this “incompleteness” that becomes not only a fact, but a constructive element in the film, carrying a lot of meaning, and leading me to consider the *Passenger* as an open work. Accepting this assumption, we can analyse the film from a few different, yet nonexclusive perspectives. I would like above all to focus on the search for the main structure, the compositional framework, which made it possible to display the totality of the narrative conflict, as well as a concrete vision of the camp at Auschwitz. I am therefore interested in the space-time structures, and how they are implemented in the film.

Unfortunately, there is not enough space here for an in-depth discussion of the complex changes between Zofia Posmysz’s novel, the script, the storyboard, and finally the film, which gradually made the word lose much of its sense-making value and its emotional energy, in favour of the image. Undoubtedly, the voice-over accompanying the pictures is an artificial creation, a journalistic transcript, and as such should not be equated with the pictures, which, either in the camp part, or in the fragmented contemporary scenes of the film, remain the proper cinematic text. The images are so full of meaning and content that they appear self-sufficient; there is no need to confront them with the text. For this reason, the role of the dialogues is greatly reduced in the storyboard, as compared to the script, and on location in Auschwitz it eventually transpired that the camp could not be described, only shown. Auschwitz’s space produces silence – no words are enough. The picture becomes self-explanatory, and within the formal aspects of the film, it is the picture that is the basic unit of meaning, although its origin, one should not forget, is to be found in the word.

In my view, in the *Passenger* the image is not always one with the frame, even less so with the onscreen space. A single image, depending on the complexity of meaning it carries, may overlap with the film frame, can be confined to a single element inside the frame, or go beyond the onscreen space. Depending on the contents of the image, which become the object of our curiosity, the visual unit of meaning will be interchangeable: a single frame, a shot, or a scene consisting of many shots. I would also consider the background sounds to be images, which in this film, have very specific references to the off-screen space. We are therefore

dealing with overlapping pictures of different size and intensity, which have the purpose of multiplying and diversifying meanings. These overlapping picture layers are fused into one, albeit heterogeneous, structure by the space-time of the film.

Using the concept of space-time, I begin with Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope. Bakhtin describes the relationship between time and space in a literary work thus: *In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope*<sup>1</sup>. These considerations can also be applied to the medium of film, in which pictures from different time and space dimensions intersect in a similar way. The main function of the so-conceived space-time both in film and in literature is to create a basis for the materialisation of specific narrative events and the author's thoughts and ideas.

In Munk's film, we find many moments in time and places in space, which do not overlap, but remain dependent on each other. The images of the ship's space in the present, and the space of the camp in Auschwitz, both in the past and at the time of filming, could be subject to a separate analysis. All these independent space and time perspectives can be found in the film, and may be captured on the visual level. But the main structure is the space-time of memory, because, as indicated by Bakhtin: *Within the limits of a single work (...) we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work (...); it is common moreover, to one of these chronotopes to envelop or dominate others*<sup>2</sup>.

In the *Passenger*, the dominant feature is the space-time of memory, understood in its most multidimensional way, as memory of places and times, people and things, sounds and words. The first and foremost significance is not the memory in its positive sense, as an ability to remember events, but its negative reverse – forgetfulness. In *Passenger*, memory and forgetfulness produce tension, are in a state of dialectical confrontation. There are victories of memory, when images of the past are saved from oblivion; and gaps and understatements in the visual sphere, which testify to the supremacy of forgetfulness. Ultimately we too are required to remember rather than to forget.

It is appropriate, I think, to consider space-time in the context of memory, as the essence of remembering is the inseparability of space and time. The process of recollection involves introducing the past experience into the space of the present, which is perceived as a space-time whole. The centre of the space-time memory in Munk's film consists of the complex structure of Lisa's memories; in its sphere, pictures from the past overlap with those of the present. As a result, we can participate in the reconstruction of the conflict played out in Auschwitz. I would like, however, to deal only with the space-time relationships that create the framework, that build the context and the base for the narrative drama. In the literary archetype, that is Posmysz's novel, and later the script and the shooting script, this base is formed from contemporary events taking place on the ship. In the thread of the film, we only have still shots interlaced with preserved retrospectives. Before I turn to the detailed analysis of the images on the ship in the present time, I would like to draw attention to the very important and often overlooked question of the photos showing Munk, which precede the stills from the ship.

The film begins with snaps from Andrzej Munk's private album. Initially, they show him in his intimate spaces; in a few others we see the director on location in Nowe Miasto (the New Town), where he lived for years. The following pictures delve even deeper into his privacy, and we see Munk in his apartment, against the backdrop of one of the sculptures he collected. Later, we see some still shots from the film set on "Batory", which portray the director at work. We thus enter his professional space; we observe Munk bent over the camera, talking to actors and the crew. These sequences end with a picture of the director lost deep in thought, which by a technical device transports us to the space of the ship; it also reminds us that we are not looking through a photo album, but watching filmed photographs. The cinematic quality is established by the palpable presence of the camera, emphasized by its action. Munk's portrait, initially filling the entire screen, moves away from the viewer as the camera zooms out. His photograph remains in the centre of the frame outlined by a black background.

This casual assortment of stills, accompanied by Woroszyński's off-screen voice introducing us to the circumstances of the making of the film, and explaining the motives of the director's collaborators in completing his work, has a meaning much deeper than that suggested by word alone. Even before the beginning of the film, we get to meet the director, who thus enters the space-time of the film. Usually, the director's person is removed from the reception of a feature film, hidden behind his work, even more so than in literature. In film, the relationship between the author and the narrator has no real importance, unlike in the literary text. When watching a film, the spectator only implicitly recognizes the existence of the filmmaker. Yet, in the case of the *Passenger*, the late director is revealed in the visual layer of the film, in its space-time of memory. Private pictures, unrelated in any way to the film's storyline, become an integral part of its formal structure. This widens the field of dialogue between the filmmaker and the spectator, for the former no longer hides behind technical or artistic interventions but shows his face, his true face – even if cinematic.

The stills from the film's set have one more important meaning. We not only see the director at work, but we see much more: the director at work with actors, in a specific film set. The fictional space of the ship, on board of which Lisa returns to Germany with her husband, is presented to the spectator as the real space of the film. Before they are shown as main characters in the space-time of the film, we get to know them as actors, during a short break or whilst filming.

Munk's collaborators documented not only his presence, but also his style of work. For this reason, many critics note that *Passenger* becomes a film about a director, a film about making a film, a film work interrupted by death. These considerations, provoked by the sequence of pictures, become the frame of the entire message of the film, a metafilm. The discussed sequence introduces a note of mourning: the last portrait of Munk receding from the spectator into a black screen is a simple visual epitaph in memory of the late director. Thanks to this formal solution, not only Munk, or the memory of his life, but also Death enters the space-time of the film. This structural intervention adopted by the film crew to complete the *Passenger* is in perfect harmony with the whole film, where death and remembrance are after all constantly present. It is not enough to say that his collaborators had no other choice and opted for the least invasive method of showing the footage

shot by Munk; we need to take it further and recognize that their idea brilliantly recapitulates the meanings which repeatedly return throughout the film. The resulting visual construction becomes the first level at which we can talk about the memorial structuralisation of space-time in *Passenger*.

The next level is the space-time of the fictional present, that is the contemporary scenes shot on "Batory". Both in the radio play and the TV performance, the problematic weight of the whole plot focused precisely on the present. Lisa's memories were only revealed in word, as successive monologues. Even before the start of filming, Munk realized that the introduction of flashback images would break up the uniformity of the narrative and introduce a new dimension of space-time. Yet the script and the storyboard leave no doubts as to the original meaningful role of the contemporary conflict taking place on the ship.

The shots on "Batory" were taken first, before the crew went to Auschwitz. On board the liner, it became clear to everyone, especially to Munk, that technical and organizational problems aesthetically disqualified the filmed material. Later, when footage from the concentration camp began to largely outnumber the scenes in the script, there were doubts as to whether the contemporary part, as originally planned and executed, was sufficiently justified in the structure of the film. The huge emotional and problematic weight of the Auschwitz images representing the past made it harder to coherently assemble it with the material filmed on the ship. Munk was trying to find a solution at all costs, planning to re-shoot the entire contemporary part, based on a revised screenplay, but unfortunately death interrupted his artistic plans. His colleagues faced an extremely difficult task, having to complete the film without knowing the director's latest conception. The "Kamera" film crew, with whom Munk was shooting the *Passenger*, worked for two years on the material left by the late director. Munk's colleagues and friends finally decided that the contemporary part was not going to be re-shot from scratch, nor assembled from pictures taken on the "Batory". Instead, they decided to merely hint at the contemporary action, by showing just a few frames selected from the material filmed on the ship. Shortly after the film's premiere, critics raised doubts as to whether the proposed solution was the best possible. I do not attempt to find a single answer to this question, but I am convinced that this solution was almost obvious, and arose directly from the existing material, the memories of conversations with Munk, and the storyboard.

Considering a lack of any retrospection would be a great loss to the structure of the film, and in principle would prevent understanding its main conflicts, the complex issues in the contemporary part of the film are sufficiently clearly and comprehensively outlined by the existing albeit fragmentary pictures. The way in which Lisa constructs her memories, and how they are presented to the spectator on screen, says just about everything about the past and present emotions of the protagonist, her dilemmas, and the issues which now belong to the present. Both the form in which images of the past are recalled, and Lisa's attitude towards her past, exhaust what Munk considered the main theme of this film, which is the *liability of conscience and the limitations of human endurance*<sup>3</sup>. The missing present time scenes do not endanger in the slightest the uniformity or the fullness of the film, as they are more than compensated for by the emotional richness and the clarity of the flashback images. In the radio play and the TV show, the drama was

played in the present time, because flashbacks, even if technically possible, would only double up the meaning; in the film the situation is reversed. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons why Munk was dissatisfied with the present time scenes, was that they did not seem to add anything new to the film; in an overly symbolic way, they showed what was already powerfully expressed in the flashbacks. The only reason for having the on-board scenes would be to create a background, the space-time situation of the film, in which the heroine's personal drama was being played out.

Thus the first reason why the team's editing of the modern part seems as the director would have intended it, is that the selected shots fittingly describe the framework of the conflict, and do not repeat what Lisa tells us through her memories. I also think that these pictures and their layout have a much deeper meaning, closely related to how the *Passenger* depicts the problem of time and memory. This issue is also present in the structural basis of Andrzej Munk's other films, which I would like to recall here.

*Man on the Tracks* (*Człowiek na torze*), the director's feature film debut, was sometimes compared to *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles, because of its specific narrative structure<sup>4</sup>. Both films use a similar narrative method, which seems more literary than cinematic. In these films, a man's death becomes a pretext to reconstruct the story of his life, seen from several different points of view. The present time in both cases is only necessary to briefly introduce the narrator, but the main material is made of three stories which in various ways reconstruct the past. The eponymous heroes in *Citizen Kane* and *Man on the Tracks* never appear on screen within the structure of the objective present; we only see them in subjective memories recalled by supporting characters. Each new narrative on the one hand shows us the same story in a different light, and on the other brings in completely new elements, and enriches the characterisation of the hero, without ever closing its interpretation. Both directors suggest that only the multiplication of subjective narratives gets us closer to the truth about another person, and this truth is never exhausted, regardless of the number of narrators<sup>5</sup>. Likewise in *Passenger* we are dealing with three separate streams of memories of the same events, but there is only one narrator who tells his own story in different ways. It transpires that not only does each person perceive and reconstruct specific experiences in their own way, but even one person in the same moment of time seemingly recalls memories which are inconsistent or even contradictory.

In *Bad Luck* (*Zezowate szczęście*), his penultimate film, just as in *Passenger*, Munk introduces only one narrator, who is also the main hero of the story. Likewise, the present time is only a frame, a reference point, which determines the hero's past in relation to his future. In the *Passenger*, images of the present time feature more frequently than in *Bad Luck*, and separate the different versions of Lisa's memories. Piszczyk, on the other hand, tells his story uninterrupted, so it is easy to forget about the space-time from which his voice comes. Such a memory structure makes the spectator treat the hero's story as objective truth, a scheme brilliantly destroyed by Munk in his *Passenger*:

Comparing *Passenger* with earlier films by Munk shows how important the problem of an authentic narrative was in his entire body of work. Undoubtedly, his long-standing practice of documentary filmmaking greatly contributed to the formation of the director's field of interest. It was the documentary film, which for



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)

Munk often meant staging a story using authentic means and authentic locations, which raised his awareness of the issue of realism in constructing a character. Munk always sought to accurately illustrate what the character he was interested in had to say. This either led to a multiplication of voices, or to the monologue-based narrative, which completely hid the personality of the director. Munk was less interested in what a man did, than in how he commented on or looked back on his actions. For this reason his films are dominated by the past, while the present time becomes of secondary importance.

During the filming of the *Passenger*, Munk wanted to focus more on the contemporary plot, but yet again, it transpired that man is best described by his past, or rather the way in which he or she reconstructs his/her past. The present time plot, so lively in the script and storyboard, withered on the film set, to be finally shown only in its vestigial form. Lesiewicz's montage of images, in addition to its basic function, which was to explain the plot and introduce the spectator to the space-time of the film, also referred to Munk's previous works. It clearly recalled his attempts to construct a narrative from the hero's perspective, and his analysis of the possibilities of entering the core of the character, by revealing not only his/her emotions, but also their way of thinking, and relation to surrounding reality. Finally, when watching *Passenger*, as in the two previous films, I feel that the protagonist is placed in a specific, yet somewhat undetermined, time and place, and the entire time-space depends on him and his story; the viewer is stuck with the hero, and cannot rely on directions or suggestions by an all-knowing narrator.

This is why among other things, the voice-over added by Wiktor Woroszyński appears so controversial; if the pictures simply introduce the plot, direct our attention to the main character, and allow us both to penetrate her emotions and to prepare for her story, it is the words that impose themselves with a too ready interpretation, and suggest meanings which do not result directly from these images. No doubt, he had the best intentions, but we cannot resist the impression that Woroszyński got too carried away by his literary passion, which in effect led to excessive moralizing and passing of far-fetched judgments on the behaviour of the protagonist. I feel that we ought simply to accept the voice-over as it is, bearing in

mind that it was not even remotely authored by Munk. There is no question that the film crew deserves credit for the contemporary part of the film, if not the voice-over. Even if the film is treated as an integrated audio-visual unit, where each image is accompanied by sound, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the sound which would best harmonize with images of the faded present would be the dead silence.

As I previously mentioned, many critics referred to the problem of fragmentation in the contemporary part of the *Passenger*. In their comments we can detect a significant evolution in relation to what we discuss here. Immediately after the film's premiere, when the director's death was still fresh in people's minds, reviews were mostly dominated by opinions that the still shots from the ship should not be considered in artistic, but documentary terms. Gradually, however, there were more voices suggesting that these images have their own distinctive value and are not exclusively testimony to the fact that the film was unfinished by Munk. I would agree that the space-time layer in the film opens a wide field of interpretations, although I am aware that further analysis might go beyond Munk's intentions. The present time in the film, as it is shown to us, provokes two basic questions: what kind of space-time was created by these images? And how important is the fact that they are static pictures?<sup>6</sup> Certainly it is clear, even at the level of the screenplay, that the contemporary plot on the liner provides a pretext to set off the drama; a specific place in reality, and a moment in time will force the heroine to confront her own past, and enable her to reconstruct her memories. But why had Munk chosen this particular place and time for his protagonist? Why had he placed her at this point in space-time with all her emotions, thoughts, memories and her oblivion?

The sequence of the contemporary pictures discussed here opens up with four shots of the vessel ranging from the full shot, through two medium shots, to the half close-up. In the first picture the transatlantic liner, photographed from the bird's-eye view on the background of a vast sheet of water, looks like a tiny island. In the next two, it fills the entire screen space and explicitly becomes the centre of the filmed reality. In addition, the position of the liner within the frame on the diagonal leading from upper left to lower right, suggests that the vessel is in motion, even though we see it in a static photo. This setting also creates an illusory impres-



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)

sion that the liner is approaching the spectator, sailing into the film's space-time. In the last picture the ship, seen from the side, seems to glide in all its vastness in front of our eyes; the stern remains outside the frame, which further reinforces the impression of movement. Not without significance is the direction of the movement, from left to right, giving rise to the illusion of a purposefulness of this move, as if leading to a set point, while the opposite direction would suggest the reversing of the ship.

Another easy to isolate group of pictures takes us on board the transatlantic liner, with its carefree and peaceful atmosphere. We see pictures variable in terms of the set's size, where among the many passengers from time to time we notice Walter and Lisa. The ship's space is primarily shown as a place of entertainment and leisure, and this time no impression of movement is created; on the contrary, everything appears perfectly still in the sunny bliss. The camera seems to wander amongst indolent passengers, in search of someone more interesting, someone to whom it may pay some attention. Finally Lisa is chosen and presented in two consecutive views: the American shot and the half close-up. From then onwards we have no doubt who the main character of the film is, and we will soon learn that she is to be the narrator. We do not know why her, but with her we are waiting for further developments.

Another group of photos depict this waiting; the first one shows an unknown passenger, the second the captain, and both are looking through binoculars at something situated far away from the ship's deck, out of the film's frame. These suggested looks into the distance once again make us aware of the purpose of this journey, and restore our faith in the ship being in motion. The following shots finally reveal the long awaited destination, the fast approaching port, shown in gradually shorter shots, at which the liner eventually calls. Immediately, we sense a change of tempo and dynamics; the next pictures show a crowded harbour bustling with life. It transpires that all this confusion is watched with curiosity from the deck by Lisa: she is amused by an elegant couple who are trying to force their bored little boy to once again wave goodbye to his grandma left on the shore. Lisa's eyes also fall on the gangway, where presumably a late passenger is running, turning back to look at someone she has left in the port.

The next shots, although static, brilliantly suggest the growing tension that accompanies Lisa. We notice that she cannot take her eyes off the young woman; she focuses all her attention on her, as if trying to find something which would explain this suddenly increased interest. The new passenger walks straight at Lisa, and rapidly, the still view of her whole figure in middle shot gets closer, and we see her face in full close-up. In this shot, if we refer to the concepts of Barthes, the *punctum*, the thing that focuses all the attention, which pierces and wounds, is the eyes, the gaze that Lisa cannot escape. The following shots, alternately show that riveting look and a tense, silent horror on Lisa's face, for the blow is so strong that under its impact she steps back. It is this step backward that becomes a step from the present into the past.

Before I take the reconstruction of images further, I would like to reflect on what basis this step into the abyss of memories is made possible, and on the real meaning of the boat journey. The inspiration for the first version of the *Passenger*; the text for the radio play, was Zofia Posmysz's chance meeting with a group of

German tourists at one of the squares in the centre of Paris. In the crowd, the author heard a female voice, which strongly reminded her of the voice of an SS guard, the supervisor in Auschwitz. But right from the start, she explained she had decided to place the film's action on board of a luxury liner, because it is a space one cannot escape<sup>7</sup>. The vessel, which seemed a peaceful space, turns out to be a trap. Lisa has nowhere to hide from the passenger, nor can she in any way hasten the moment of separation. She is doomed to her tormenting presence, and the feeling of her own powerlessness is unbearable and adds to the mental tension. Thus the first meaning of the immobility which envelops the ship's space-time by way of still shots is that it becomes a prison for the main heroine; a place where nothing can change as long as Lisa does not free herself from the spectre of the past.

Another explanation relates directly to a popular perception of the ship's space, which Woroszyński's voice-over calls *an island in time*, a place where *there is no yesterday and no tomorrow*, where time has stopped. It is easy to imagine that the long, monotonous transatlantic journey may arouse in passengers the illusion of total stillness; time runs on in parallel, whereas the ship stands still. These days or weeks are removed from the normal course of time, and the passenger is suspended<sup>8</sup>. The still pictures of the ship, especially those showing Lisa and Walter among other passengers, even before the appearance of the alleged Marta, are images of a reigning atmosphere of isolation, laziness and stagnation, undisturbed even by the next port of call.

Definitely more interesting, however, are interpretations directly relating the stillness of the shots of the contemporary part with the main protagonist. The script contains the suggestion that Lisa's journey is really a voyage from the past to the future. This formulation, it seems, can be understood in two different ways: in the first, Lisa's past was her stay in America, which has now ended, and the future is related to her travel destination, which in this extended time on the ship is not yet clear to her. Yet, in the context of the whole film, we should accept that Lisa's past was rather her stay in Auschwitz, and the entire journey from that past into an anxious future takes place during this voyage, and is triggered by the appearance of the silent passenger. Regardless of what explanation we adopt, the present time becomes most important, imprisoning Lisa, forcing her both to return to her past and to look forward to the future, with the hope of a final release, an escape.

Andreas Wadensjö presented three interesting ways of understanding the present in *Passenger*. Firstly, the present moment, the "now", in which Lisa is caught, has frozen for her under the influence of a strong shock, that is meeting a ghost from her past. Lisa freezes upon sight of the boarding passenger; *her sense of reality is so fundamentally shocked, that her it is brought to a standstill*<sup>9</sup>. Such an approach, however, does not explain why even before the appearance of "Marta", the time course is arrested in the film. According to the second explanation, static images become a *reflection of Lisa's moral and psychological condition; she has more or less forgotten the cruel events of the war, and the immobility ought to be seen as a state of "oblivion" for Lisa, her denial of memory. When later, she reminds herself of this past, the images begin to move (...)*<sup>10</sup>. The last explanation suggested by the author, is associated with the functioning of memory, which interests me here. Still pictures show a normal reality, as we perceive it, *while memory has a completely*



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)

*different character: our visual memories are not static, but mobile; the memory (or imagination) can create worlds of a different nature than the so-called "sense of reality"* <sup>11</sup>. For this reason, it was necessary to introduce in the film a clear distinction, a contrast between the space-time of the present and the space-time of memory. Munk was also aware of this, and even before starting filming, he decided together with the operator, that the camp part will be shot in wide format, and the ship part in the traditional one. The successive retrospections were also conceived in different styles, so their visual mood was relevant to the function they fulfilled in relation to the contemporary part. Thus from the beginning it was important to clearly distinguish between the concrete layers of space-time, as well as the emotions and the dramatic successive waves of memories.

In the film, in the shape we see it today, the contrast between the present and the past is definitely sharper than planned, but also more surprising and of richer meaning. In my understanding, this contrast is also closely associated with the functioning of memory, specifically with the mechanism of memory formation at a certain point in time. There is no question that living in time is not a succession of moments which might be called present moments, and which can be captured in their separateness. Despite the illusion that leads us to perceive time as forward looking and forward moving, it rather seems that time goes in the opposite direction, and at any moment passes us by. When we run ahead of time, not only with our thoughts, but with our whole being, this same moment becomes the past. So in every elusive, mobile moment, our past grows, and somehow swells behind us.

But the past is not identical with memory, nor is it the storehouse of memories, where we can always find every moment that has passed. Bergson argued that: *In reality, the past is preserved by itself automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant, all that we have felt, thought and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present, which is about to join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside* <sup>12</sup>. The past is constantly and in all its vastness present at every moment, but only appears in our consciousness when it may be useful, when it can help to understand the present or predict the future. The present time, however, is never "that what is", but "that what is happening", and our perception of it is conditioned by the past, by the memory "of what has already happened", even if we are not aware of it.

So how can the present be stopped in the ship's space in *Passenger*? It seems that although we cannot stop the advancing past, which absorbs the future, we can experience a subjective feeling of suspension in a particular moment. It is precisely that moment when we completely concentrate on the past, trying to extract an image from it. In order to recall, build, and relive memories, it is necessary to rely on a stable present. Of course this moment must be free of any actual "happening", must be completely dedicated to the exploration of one's own memory in search of a past experience. So the moment in which we knowingly give up action in the present and consciously stop being interested in it, in favour of the past, we also stop the subjective passage of time and the "now" becomes "that which is". We are dealing with just such a situation in the *Passenger*; Lisa, of course not from her own free will, yet consciously, delves into her past and that is why her "now" freezes. The past in the space-time of her memory becomes "that which is happening".

In his third interpretation, Wadensjö claimed that the main fabric of the film is made of Lisa's memories, in relation to which the present time is entirely external and as such should be contrasted with the powerful, predatory stream of flashbacks. To a certain extent, when it comes to the requirement of contrasting the images, I agree with this statement, but I think that which is happening (or rather "that which is") on the ship is not a "normal", objective reality, because as such it should precisely be flowing, it should be in constant motion. The arrested "now" of the contemporary part therefore also belongs to Lisa's subjective time. In *Passenger* inner time operates at every level, because the dominant space-time of the film is a complicated memory structure of the main protagonist. In the film we see images of both the past and the present through Lisa's eyes. It was for Lisa that time stopped, giving her the opportunity to penetrate into her own past, and that step back which she was finally forced to take, is what pushes her into the depths of her own memory.

This image is extremely expressive: Lisa steps back, feeling that the passenger is inevitably approaching, just as inevitably as the moment when she will join up the still image of the present with the image of the past, which is gaining momentum as it emerges from the dark. It should be noted that this association is not of an abrupt nature; the appearance of the passenger, her piercing gaze, is the impetus for starting the strenuous search in Lisa's mind. The memory crystallizes very slowly, since this fragment of the heroine's past was hidden in her deepest subconscious. It is difficult to clearly determine whether this denial was directly related to the guilt troubling Lisa, to her shame. It seems though that she just never needed these memories; after the war, she lived her life in a way that precluded the usefulness of the camp's memories, while after many years they were naturally buried in the memory of past events. So now, with present time is already frozen, Lisa breaks away from it, to go back first to her past in general, and then to specific moments in time; it is like groping in the dark, reminiscent of setting a camera<sup>13</sup>. Lisa does not search her own past with a prepared visual template; she does not yet exactly know what she is looking for, but begins to have an idea. The passenger's gaze which so torments Lisa, does not necessarily have to refer directly to Marta's image, but could be a place and time at which the heroine felt just as tormented. Memory, at the first stage of its exploration, seems more emotional than visual. Maybe the process of recollection triggered by an intense emotional stimulus first awakes feelings in us, which we then associate with pictures. Munk's task was to give these first memories the form of an image of emotions, rather than an image which awakens emotions.

Bergson thus described the stirring of senses that the appearance of a memory in our consciousness arouses: *it gradually appears in shape similar to a thickening nebula, passing from a state of virtuality into actuality, its contours shape up, the surface takes on colour, and it starts to imitate perception. (...) The past, by its very nature being something virtual, can be recognized by us as the past only if we assimilate the motion, by which it develops into the actual image, emerging from the darkness into daylight*<sup>14</sup>. Lisa discovers this motion – a motion of power, violence and slavery, a motion bogged down in the mud of the camp. From darkness to daylight, images of emotions appear, of the consistency of thickening nebula – the shot showing Lisa stepping back into the past is flooded by a beam of white light, which generates a sequence of images found in her memory under the influence of the

passenger's gaze. Andrzej Brzozowski told me that this white light had to have precisely such a visual impact, brutally separating Lisa's present from her past<sup>15</sup>. This flash of light means that the heroine has found the space-time she was searching for, hidden for so long in the dark.

Now, because at this point Lisa's past becomes her present, the first image she sees is a circle formed by prisoner functionaries, holding hands during selection, and in the middle a staggering, naked female prisoner. The next shot shows two rows of soldiers with dogs and female kapos, naked prisoners running in between them. A naked corpse dragged through the mud by another prisoner. German shepherd dogs sitting in even rows, panting. Prisoners pulling a huge cylinder with great effort. More rows of panting dogs. The dead body of a prisoner, electrocuted by the barbed wire. A circle of kapos with a few naked prisoners. A nude prisoner in close-up, caught on the neck by a cane during selection. More prisoners pulling a cylinder. Soldiers marching near the wires, with dogs on leashes. Again the circle during selection, in the middle more women trying to cover their nakedness. Prisoners pulling prams in the mud. A prisoner's hair brutally cropped. Tattooing a prison number on the forearm.

These first flashback images succeed each other at a very rapid pace. All are very much overexposed, clearly stylized to look like archive footage or chronicle photos. None return in the second and third retrospection; even the selection scene is later shown in quite a different way, and unlike the first one, takes place at night. So how should we understand these sequences of dramatic images, so unique in the space of the whole film, and so expressive? The first association that imposes itself almost automatically is Proust's "madeleine", or the short-term memory, very intense and full of emotion. Of course, in Proust, we are dealing with memories of a far less violent nature, whose emergence causes an ecstatic sensation, but the essence of the process remains the same. An external sensory stimulus tugs at a certain string of memory, and this vibration incites – or, as in the case of Lisa and the passenger, forces us to find – from the past the same quiver and the same sensory stimulus. Essentially, at first this is the repetition of a particular emotion. Depending on the complexity of the sought-out feeling, and its depth of immersion in the space of memory, finding the right track can be instant, or might require more time. Its most important aspect is a rapidly growing anxiety: firstly, can it be repeated; secondly, will it indeed be as emotional? What Lisa finds in her memory shocks her – having recognized the passenger's gaze, and followed this trail, she rediscovered the essence of the camp at Auschwitz.

Yet this essence is not exactly what Lisa experienced in that space; it is a much more intense experience, and repetition is not the right definition for it. Just as in the case of the "madeleine", which leads to the result that *Combray rises up, not as it was experienced in contiguity with the past sensation, but in a splendour, with the "truth", that never had an equivalent in reality*<sup>16</sup>, Auschwitz in the flashback gains the quality of truth, but not objective truth, which is most probably impossible to attain in the space-time of memory, but emotional truth. This is not about the events in which Lisa participated whilst in the camp; rather, this deals with the shock it is to her to recall it. It transpires that, after many years, she recalls the person she was then in quite a different way; her memories are in fact the memories of a prisoner, not a guard. What is important is not that Lisa was also a prisoner,

but the evolution that her recollections underwent in the deepest layers of her memory. She was convinced that in the space that was probed by the arrival of the passenger, there was little left, yet those memories exploded, forming a frightening whole, even to Lisa herself. In the following flashbacks, guards and soldiers, especially of lower rank, are portrayed on the same level as Lisa; meanwhile in this quivering sequence of images, returns the sense of the expanse of power that dominates and controls all. Marching SS soldiers are filmed slightly from below, in a way that is not only frightening, but likely caused by fear. Their powerful erect figures against the barbed wire fence create an atmosphere of threat and domination. Sitting in rows, German shepherd dogs form a battle array, ready at any moment to jump. But the prisoners shown in the close up, in their daily sufferings, their moments of greatest humiliation, or death, are not the same prisoners whom Lisa recalls with such disdain and arrogance in the next two waves of already controlled memories.

The first sequence of flashback pictures form the visual essence of fascism, as a specifically hyperemotional approach to power and oppression. The next two waves of memories recall fascism that is largely consistent with popular beliefs, formed from the testimonies of SS soldiers during public trials. The system of fascist power was seen primarily in terms of a well-functioning machine, where each element was assigned a place and a task, and thoughtlessly executed. Yet the discussed sequence of images shows that fascism for a fascist was also chaos, an abyss of criminal instincts, primal instincts, and this machine, transforming millions into ash, is in fact the negation of rationalism; when judged from the perspective of one's own emotional memory, it seems surreal. It is not that after many years, and under the effect of a shock, Lisa finally understands and realizes a fact to which she was previously blind and deaf, namely, the criminality of the system in which she worked. This way of evoking memories excludes the functioning of intellect, and prevents awareness of the complex problems of fascism. However, it allows the introduction of certain long suppressed emotions into one's consciousness. Feelings plucked from the past, from the depths of one's memory, are more intense than those felt at the time; they are the essence of those sensations, and in the film they are realised by sequences of images of emotions.

It is significant that these individual images are not placed in chronological order; they do not form a logical sequence, they do not illustrate linearly ordered events. The first flashback shows the memories in an "atomized" form, still unorganized as a narrative. This also demonstrates that this layer of the past, which has never been *absorbed by Lisa in the form of a story, constitutes an element of the "never told"*<sup>17</sup>. Munk has shown a memory in its pure state, which only later, after it has moved from the realm of the subconscious, will be subjected to reconstruction by the conscious narrative.

The first retrospection is therefore a result of the shock that was meeting the passenger, or rather her gaze. The look of the woman alleged to be Marta illuminated the whole of Lisa's past, and forced her to take on the agony of recollection. Lisa's emotions, whose images we see on the screen, designate a very specific moment in *Passenger's* memory space-time. It is a moment, in which the past grows larger than the present, and absorbs the heroine, without taking her out of reality entirely. Lisa is still standing motionless on the deck; what happened a moment

ago, and what is happening now has a huge influence on her memories. As she still remains in touch with the present, she can return to it, breaking away from the revived past, seemingly unstoppable in its rush.

Walter grabs Lisa's forearm, which awakens in her the last image of Auschwitz – the tattooing of the number on the prisoner's arm – and interrupts this sequence of memories. Lisa is again in the present, and the departure of the passenger, as well as the appearance of her husband, confirm that time stopped only for her.

Walter has rescued Lisa from being submerged by emotions of the past, but the signs of these emotions, the terror and horror that he saw in her face, force him to ask questions. Lisa, still too shaken and stripped of her serene indifference, does not have the strength to pretend that nothing has happened. Initially, quite brutally, she tells her husband that she has lied about her wartime past, but she soon comes to her senses. She realises that in this situation, from which she can no longer escape, the only recourse is to stay calm and rationalize what undoubtedly needs to be said. The whole story, which Lisa apparently makes up as she goes along, forms the second retrospection in the film.

The second wave of memories is a confession, and Lisa finally agrees that Walter be her judge. The story is not synonymous with the usual free telling of memories. Lisa imposes on herself a certain rigour, adopts a strategy that enables her to control her own reactions, emotions and behaviour. Her attitude, her way of presenting the past in which she took part, directly recalls the testimonies of former SS officers submitted during their trials. It seems that although this meeting with the past at this point in time was a shock for Lisa, which temporarily led her to lose control of herself, she has long been internally preparing to confront – not so much her own memory – but rather her husband. The strategy which she adopts is *based on preparing, and telling a story – to others and to oneself – about who we are*<sup>18</sup>. The primary task Lisa undertook, when creating her own story, was that of selecting memory material in such a way that it seemed fully credible, and more importantly entirely objective.

Lisa's confession strongly resembles Rudolf Hoess's memoirs, written in his *Autobiography*, during his trial. Hoess, for years first commandant of Auschwitz, does not try to deny the obvious. He does not deny who he was, and is proud of his position, and how well he carried out his responsibilities. Lisa is the same, for she does not dispute either the existence of the camp, nor the role it played in the system of the Third Reich. However, both Hoess and Lisa are trying in their memories to focus the audience's attention not on themselves, but on the huge machines that were Auschwitz and Birkenau. Consequently, they only allocate themselves a negligible role in this machine, and attribute minimum impact of their actions on the functioning of the camp, which was controlled by top-down orders. Certainly Lisa has an easier task; she was indeed much lower down in the camp's hierarchy than the prison's first commandant, who at times was almost bursting with barely concealed pride at the enormous responsibility he had been charged with. Despite this, they both equally seek to emphasize that they had no direct impact on the pervasive violence prevailing in the camp; there were many others who were far crueler and degenerate than them. Lisa's attitude is, therefore, typical of former functionaries of the Nazi system when coming to terms with their past, and the heroine relies precisely on the fact that her story is no different from that of hundreds of others.

In the second retrospective, Lisa makes a selection from her experiences in the camp. She chooses those elements of the past which are socially acceptable in the present, and combines them to form a natural chronological order. Only when we confront this story with the third narrative retrospection does it transpire that Lisa's confession to her husband is full of gaps, ambiguities and apparent inversions of time, which do not permit the recreation of actual cause and effect relationships. This illusion of narrative coherence is possible thanks to, *on the one hand, the constructive elements of the story taking on meaning according to their position in the configuration of the whole, on the other, that they have been selected for their relevance to the subject and their relation with autobiographical complexes*<sup>19</sup>. Once we are aware of the fragmentary and selective nature of her confidences, the search for the truth inevitably returns, regarding the extent to which the heroine is honest with herself and Walter.

During filming at Auschwitz, Munk said this about Lisa's attitude: *Her story is dispassionate, her conscience – clear*<sup>20</sup>. The primary objective of the protagonist is to keep her calm, so brutally violated by the first shocking sequence of memories. Reporting to her husband on her life in the camp, Lisa herself does not yet understand why she is so shaken by the meeting with the passenger, for she has had not enough time to explore her own feelings. She tells Walter a story she had elaborated much earlier, when Auschwitz's deeply buried memories seemed to her completely understandable. There is no doubt that during all those years after Lisa had left the camp, her approach to these events did not change. The heroine was always first and foremost a strict disciplinarian, proud of praise from her superiors, and capable of minor and major abuses to earn these accolades. In her understanding up to the present time, her work in the camp was a form of fighting the enemy, and she felt like a soldier there. That is how she has evaluated her past, and on this basis she constructed her story. The meeting on the ship was a breakthrough in Lisa's emotional life, but the remnants of her presence of mind have led her to ensure that, despite changes in her situation, she tells Walter the previously thought out and polished version of events.

So, if we want to assess her admission from the angle of truth, we have to accept that it is true from the standpoint of the old Lisa. It is useful, reliable and free of extraneous emotions, but for Lisa at that moment it also remains an empty structure, which incidentally she will shatter by herself in the next retrospection. In this most difficult, decisive moment of her life, it only matters that Walter accepts her story as true. Her husband is to become her judge, and on his verdict the whole of Lisa's future will depend – is it not completely natural in such a situation that the truth of the past becomes of secondary importance?

Lisa is perfectly aware of the huge consequences that must result from her admission. Camp experiences have taught her that one of the most threatening methods, and the aim of those in power, is to force people to talk. The silence of Auschwitz prisoners was unbearable to Lisa; it was more than just a refusal to answer questions; it was primarily synonymous with the refusal to surrender to power. At the same time, the arrival of the passenger on the ship becomes an order for Lisa to talk, thus placing her not in the position of someone who has authority, but one subjected to it. In this situation, Lisa has three options: to remain silent – risking that Walter finds out the truth from other sources; to tell the whole truth – ultimately

losing all power; and finally – to fabricate the truth, to create a discursive “self”, who takes on the humiliation of talking. Lisa chooses the third solution. She constructs a confession, in which both herself and her husband possess elements of power, forcing Walter not only to listen, but also to interpret. *It was the latter function to verify this obscure truth: the revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said. The who listened was not simply the forgiving master; the judge who condemned or acquitted; his was a hermeneutic function. With regard to the confession, his power was not only to demand it before it was made, or decide what was to follow after it, but also to constitute a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment*<sup>21</sup>. One of the problems with the contemporary part of the film is whether Walter is competent to judge his own wife. Lisa, on the other hand, is undoubtedly a “competent accused”, who knows perfectly well what not to say and why, in order to maintain some remnant of power.

Regardless of the authenticity of her story, it is evident that it preserves some semblance of the truth through the heroine’s efforts to objectivise her own past. All these endeavours can be found in the visual layer of the film. The second flashback, in contrast to the first, operates through calm and long shots, which are meant to imply that Lisa wants to show everything and will not hide anything from that reality. But only she has the power to decide what will be shown in her story, and what will be removed. The camera is at all times placed on the level of Lisa’s eyes, so we see the camp through her eyes. Thanks to this technique, the protagonist ceases to participate in events and is in the position of an observer, who has no influence on reality; she can only objectively record everything that happened. Lisa wants to convince Walter that although she undeniably was “in” that environment, she was not “inside it”, and kept a distance both from prisoners and other officers.

The beginning of her visual account is significant for it captures her tendency to objectivise the truth. With a clearly audible sound of an accelerating train somewhere in the background, the camera films, devoid of the slightest emotion, Auschwitz’s main square, the entrance gate, the train track, the ramp... We get the impression that there is something unnatural in this terrible tranquillity, this dead silence. The only hint that the shots portray the camp during the war, and not afterwards, are heaps of people’s belongings discharged after unloading of the train, which appear in the foreground. Following the slow movement of the camera, two soldiers on bicycles pass through the square. A short moment later, we learn the reason for the emptiness, the piles of clothes and luggage, and why the train has already departed. The camera moves slowly over the concrete roof of the crematorium hidden underground, and then rises following the natural direction of the gaze, to the black smoking chimneys. The first sequence of images clearly shows that Lisa knew perfectly well what the main purpose of the camp was; she does not hide it from her husband and does not pretend to be naive. At the same time, however, she begins her account by emphasizing that she did not take direct part in the “liquidation” of those transported there, and only saw what was left behind, the smoke and the piles of things, which were after all her main area of interest.

In another sequence of shots, with even more accuracy, and a similar self-control, Lisa describes her own place in the environment which she has already briefly outlined. We hear the crunching of her steps as she enters the “Canada” warehouse, the block in which she was supervisor. The camera consistently shoots only what

Lisa saw, so it is she who decides on the nature and the mood of these images. Again, we see how she tries to objectivise her story, this time focusing on details. We are shown inside the barrack: everywhere lie piles of sorted belongings, which in this environment became the property of the Reich. Lisa's eyes shift from the mess and the chaos, to show us the true treasures accumulated in the warehouses. Her gaze slowly and solemnly moves along the shelf, where in neat rows are placed candlesticks, silver, crystal; her eyes linger on one of the mirrors, and stop on the next one. For the first time in the film we see Lisa in Auschwitz in her SS officer uniform. She sees her own reflection in the mirror, but is clearly reluctant to accentuate in any way her physical presence in this space, so half closes her eyes and turns away her head.

The two clearly separated sequences of images which open Lisa's story about Auschwitz, perhaps best express the strategies adopted by her. The heroine insists on the enormity of the camp, and the huge accumulation of items, while discreetly avoiding talking about herself. She only wants to be the person who tells the story; we have the impression that above all she wants to shift Walter's tense and anxious attention from her own person, to the essence of what the camp was. She will persist in this method until the end, perhaps hoping that Walter will content himself with detailed descriptions of Auschwitz, and not inquire about exactly what his wife did there.

The following image introduces prisoners of the camp. We see them only from Lisa's perspective, as they chaotically run around a square in sheer terror, trying to load onto stretchers the thick layer of mud covering the ground. From among these prisoners, later lined up in straight rows, Lisa has to choose women to work in her warehouse. The scene of selection is very interestingly filmed: we have a panoramic shot showing the faces of the women tied to the rhythm of Lisa's steps, but at times the camera stops on a particular face, to then quickly and abruptly move to the next one. All this increases our impression that the camera captures reality as seen through Lisa's eyes. Lisa chooses Marta from amongst the prisoners.

It is at this point that Lisa introduces her main character. She must also realize that talking exclusively about dry facts or the reality of the camp would provoke questions about her personal feelings, reactions or behaviour. Focusing Walter's attention on the character of Marta, she reveals about herself only that which is related to her chosen prisoner. As a result, in the second flashback it seems that Lisa does not intend to depict a false version of her relationship with Marta, but rather to use it as an escape from the inquisitiveness of her husband.

In this series of memories, Lisa does not choose Marta for herself but solely for the purpose of the story intended for Walter. That is why, in the next equally calm and long shot, we see Marta in normal clothes (except for the cross painted on her shirt), as she shuffles around the storeroom, writing something in a notebook. Tadeusz, Marta's fiancé, enters into the glazed area, located slightly above the level from which the scene is carefully observed by Lisa. Clearly this is their first encounter; Lisa suggests that it only happened thanks to her. Tadeusz sketches a portrait of Marta, laughs, tenderly touches her, but we can sense the concentrated presence of Lisa, who is watching them. We can hear a creaking, a door opens, and of course, according to the logic of this visual retrospective, it is not Lisa standing there; instead we see another reflection of her face and her firm direct look. Half

of Lisa's face is reflected in the glass door; the image is extremely complicated, filled with crossing and overlapping surfaces, reflections and refractions, which suggests the complexity of emotions accompanying the heroine. Her face is not clear, and vibrates to the rhythm of the moving door.

Her blurry reflection is the second and final portrait of Lisa in the second flashback; from now on, the only character, the driving force of Lisa's narrative, remains Marta. Thanks to her we visit along with Lisa the sick room, where Marta lies ill in the midst of other prisoners, and finally we enter Death Row, where she is taken after her arrest, and awaits to be shot. Both the sick room and Death Row are necessary to complete the image of the camp in the shape that Lisa decided to present it to Walter. They are the places, whose "fame" has survived the liquidation of Auschwitz, as it is there, except for the already mentioned crematoria, that most prisoners died. At the same time, as in the case of the crematorium, they are the places in which for quite different reasons Lisa was completely helpless. At the end of her story, Lisa emphasizes this helplessness, and combines it with her desire to help others, to save Marta's life.

This brief review of pictures which form the substance of the second retrospection is enough to understand the mechanisms of its formation. Lisa's story is made of facts selected for their present usefulness. It is not possible to assess the extent to which those facts are consistent with the truth, but this was not Munk's aim. The idea was to give visual form to very specific ways of constructing memories. The present retrospective is formally more consistent than the first one, and only when compared with the next one, does it turn out to be full of gaps. However, let us not forget that in the movie we watch it before we get to know Lisa's extensive internal memories. Should one try to put this narrative in the memory space-time of the whole film, it transpires that it is the most updated version of the past. Whilst the first flashback represented the emotional explosion of the past into the present, the second was already planned in the past as a story about what had happened long ago. It is therefore not literally related to construction of memories, but nevertheless shows a method of modelling one's memory. The second flashback, in comparison with the other two, appears to be an artificial creation, albeit constructed from real images of the past.

As one might guess, despite Lisa's best efforts, her admission comes as a shock to Walter. The rational narrative does not convince him of the negligible role his wife played in Auschwitz. For him, a "Good German", the concentration camp, even described in a manner so calm and balanced, remains unacceptable. When Lisa ends her story, the images from the ship return, in which we see Walter and his wife separately, immersed in deep thoughts. Walter is not yet in a position to pass judgment, as he does not have the ability to objectivise, undoubtedly possessed by Lisa, and is not able to judge his own wife. Lisa is trying to find a place for herself in this frozen space-time, however, the story prepared so long ago and polished to the smallest detail, of which she is now finally unburdened, does not bring her any solace. The passenger no longer appears in this sequence of images of the present, but the tension is palpable as Lisa watches the other travellers, expecting to recognize Marta. The scene from the ball, preserved in the film only in the form of a few pictures, brings Lisa to her next nervous breakdown. She feels trapped, escapes, and as we learn from the script, she locks herself in her cabin to once again return to her past.

In the third retrospection, we get to know a fuller version of Lisa's recollections, assembled by her memory, narrative and consciousness. But this painful process of remembering *is not a simple reproduction, it involves a creative reconstruction of the past, in which are interwoven impressions and information from the present; it is a creation resulting only from pre-existing patterns. (...) A conscious recollection triggers the search process – a journey through the labyrinth of history, on the paths marked out by past impressions and emotions* <sup>22</sup>. It is difficult to imagine that Lisa could be calm at the time of this journey into the depths of herself, but she certainly managed to control the emotion of the first wave of memories, so she could consciously immerse herself in the past, and return to those feelings and thoughts. Admittedly, remembering is not identical to re-experiencing; every memory has quite a different force than the currently perceived event. That is why Bergson separated awareness from memory; even though both can cause very strong emotions, they are never exactly the same. Similarly, successive memories of the same event never take the same form, for they are always influenced by the present.

The third retrospective takes a completely different visual form than the previous two. This time Lisa is being introspective, so there is no evidence of objectivization or exclusion of herself from the space-time of her own experiences. The first scene is the most significant in this context; Lisa does not need to introduce herself in the camp's space, as she did in the other flashbacks. We immediately find her in the "Canada" warehouse, in a spot that was her most private, almost intimate, space for the length of her stay in Auschwitz. Lisa confidently enters the block through a wide open door, and we see her in an American shot, in the full figure view; with a decisive gesture she smartens up her uniform. This depiction indicates that even now Lisa has a strong sense of pride, of which the SS uniform remains an important element. As in the second flashback, she is going in the direction of the storeroom, but this time we see her getting closer, firmly pressing the door handle, and with a single sharp pull opening the door. We see a half close-up of her, triumphant, at the time when she has managed to catch Marta with Tadeusz. At this point, we are dealing with a complex structure of images – in the frame of memories that Lisa weaves in the present time, we see a memory of what was already history in relation to that moment. Lisa remembers the scene, when because of some machinations of the kapo from the men's camp, it is Tadeusz who is sent to "Canada" as a prisoner assigned to help her. Moreover we discover that not only did Lisa not facilitate their meeting, but considered it a disgraceful offense against Regulations.

The third retrospection is to a large extent based on precisely such reversals and completions of events told by Lisa to her husband. Initially, we have the impression that Lisa's memories in this sequence are inconsistent, only later to discover that the structure of her earlier story was full of gaps, now filled by Lisa for her own benefit. We learn what happened in the time between the scene in the storeroom and Marta's illness and the visit to the sick room, but mostly we are told why Marta went to the Death Row. I do not wish to discuss here all the scenes that make up the last flashback, as in large part they serve to reconstruct the conflict between Lisa and Marta. For now, the most important thing for me is to uncover in her recollection significant elements of memory structures in *Passenger*.



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)

The third retrospection is entirely subjective, and is not subject to any of the consequences of the uncontrolled influx of memories. At all times the camera is located at a certain distance from Lisa, allowing her to move freely within her own memory space; thus Lisa is “inside”. Only sometimes events are filmed in a way that would indicate that we see it through Lisa’s eyes. One of these scenes, however, is extremely significant – Lisa observes the children behind barbed wire walking in pairs directly from the carriages to the crematorium. This image, given its way of being filmed, the position of the camera, and the focus of attention on select details of this event, better fits the second flashback. Clearly, Lisa found that while the sight of the chimneys smoking with human ashes does not directly concern her, the vision of children who will be shortly gassed is too private, and too intimate a sensation of her own.

In the present introspection, there is only one scene that is totally doubled up with a scene in an earlier story, and incidentally in both cases the same pictures were re-used. Again Lisa recalls her visit to Marta in the sick room. Like in many other moments of this retrospection, it is especially important to show Lisa entering the place: it emphasizes her physical presence in the concrete space, not just an awareness of its existence. The third wave of memories also carry the most violent scenes in the film, and reveals a richness of background to what in Lisa’s earlier accounts was shown as sterile. We realise that Lisa does not think herself innocent and uncontaminated by that reality, nor was she blind to the atrocities which took place in the camp. She had an unclear attitude to it, and is not willing to disclose it to Walter, so she prefers to purge her story not only of emotion, but also of all the facts that could provoke these emotions. But from the moment Lisa decides to make an effort to remember, she adds to the stream of memories not only more events, but also her own feelings. That is why, from the point of view of memory structures, the third flashback is a natural consequence of the previous two. It includes both the modified emotions of the first flashback and the completed facts of the other.

One should also consider whether the construction of Lisa’s memories exhausts the full contents of her memory; whether it says everything about the events that took place between Lisa and Marta in Auschwitz. Of course the answer is no. And not because Munk did not finish his film, but because remembering the past never

uncovers everything. Our memory stores all experiences and accompanying emotions, but only some take the form of visual memories. *The resulting structure is not, however, immutable, because what we usually call experience is undergoing constant restructuring; we continually rewrite history, change our view of individuals or events belonging to our past*<sup>23</sup>. In *Passenger*, the memory is constructed in three different ways, each primarily describing Lisa then and now, and only secondarily the reality of the camp at Auschwitz. By treating the space-time of the film as a subjective whole closely connected with Lisa, and by referring to categories of truth, all we can reconstruct are Lisa's emotions; that was after all the main theme of the film and the focus of Munk's interest. We can certainly strive to examine the images of the camp on the basis of Lisa's memories, but we must remember that Auschwitz, as indicated by the director himself, was *shown in the film through two filters: from the perspective of twenty years later, and – seen through the eyes of a German female SS-officer*<sup>24</sup>.

Those "filters", which make *Passenger* a film that is not in the strictest sense about Auschwitz, are at times quite difficult to grasp. The barely outlined contemporary part makes it easy to forget this framework, so important in understanding the director's original intentions. When Lisa finishes evoking her memories, the reality of the ship returns; in the last shots we see her and Marta passing each other on a narrow deck. Lisa initially tries to hide her face under the brim of her hat, but ultimately, in a fit of pride and determination she decides to confront Marta for the last time. She defiantly looks the passenger in the face, but the latter walks by, leaving Lisa in consternation, in eternal uncertainty. Until the end of film, we do not know if the passenger, who eventually leaves the ship, was truly Marta. Just as the passenger in the opening sequence was filmed moving closer using an American shot, now as she moves away she is filmed using a medium shot. The passenger's gaze leaves Lisa and the viewer, as she disembarks from the liner, on board of which Lisa and Walter are left. The next photos show the vessel departing from the shore; in the penultimate shot, we see the ship on the diagonal from lower left to upper right, as it sails away from the space-time of the movie. The last image filmed using a long shot shows the ship disappearing out of the film's frame.

Thus the story ends exactly as it began. Lisa's journey continues and she cannot be sure whether her subjective time will restart again, and allow her to step into the future. It is precisely the future that is absent from the structure of the space-time of this movie, but one should not be surprised – the future also depends on memory. If Lisa is in some way able to shut down her past, which already made the present stand still, there may be a future for her. At the moment, however, as the ship departs, there is no doubt that Lisa has not completed the process of reconstructing her past. What is important is not that she did not tell the "whole truth" about her life, about the camp, but that she has ahead of her many such situations, where she will have to face a flood of similar memories. Lisa now returns to Europe, to Germany, where she will not be able to avoid encountering her past.

*Forgetting is natural, and memory – a construction, an artefact*<sup>25</sup>.

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- <sup>1</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, in: his, *The Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and H. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin-Texas 1981, p. 84.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 252.
- <sup>3</sup> S. Beylin, *Z Andrzejem Munkiem rozmawiałam w poniedziałek 18 września*, "Film" 1961, no. 41, p. 11.
- <sup>4</sup> A film narrative from three different points of view is also the compositional basis of *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa. See. T. Lubelski, *Wariant obalania tabu. "Człowiek na torze"*, in: idem, *Strategie autorskie w polskim filmie fabularnym lat 1945-1961*, Kraków 2001, p. 147.
- <sup>5</sup> Very important, it seems to me, is the fact that the engine driver Orzechowski's story as told by three narrators having different opinions about the main character was Munk's idea. There was no such structure in the scenario by Stawiński. See. J. S. Stawiński, *Notatki scenarzysty, vol. I*, Warszawa 1979, p. 64.
- <sup>6</sup> It is important to introduce at this point a clear distinction between Munk's private photos and the photos from the opening of the film, as well as stills from the ship. The latter are, after all like a frozen film divided into film frames, not filmed photos. On the screen we perceive them as static, but the projection takes place normally. This film is "moving" in the same way as other movies, but some "photograms" do not change into "kinograms", but are repeated many times see. A. Wadensjö, *Wyspa w czasie*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", autumn-winter 2002, no. 39-40, p. 179.
- <sup>7</sup> I refer here to a conversation with Zofia Posmysz which took place on the 4 March 2003.
- <sup>8</sup> See A. Wadensjö, op. cit. p. 175.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>12</sup> H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. A. Mitchell, Dover Publications, New York 1998, p. 5.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>15</sup> I refer here to a conversation with Andrzej Brzozowski on the 7 March 2003.
- <sup>16</sup> G. Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. R. Howard, The Athtone Press, London 2000, p. 56.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Kordys, *Pamięć i opowiadanie*, in: *Praktyki opowiadania*, selected texts, eds. B. Owczarek, Z. Mitos, W. Grajewski, Kraków 2001, p. 142.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.
- <sup>20</sup> S. Beylin, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, transl. R. Hurley, Penguin, London 1990, pp. 66-67.
- <sup>22</sup> J. Kordys, op. cit., p. 139.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 130.
- <sup>24</sup> S. Beylin, op. cit.
- <sup>25</sup> J. Kordys, op. cit., p. 129.



*Passenger*, dir. Andrzej Munk (1963)

# A Bodiless Enemy \*

RAFAŁ MARSZAŁEK

Warsaw – bombed in September 1939, devastated during the battles of the Warsaw Uprising, and methodically, systematically, house after house, burnt down after the fall of the Uprising – had four cinemas immediately after the war. To get to these cinemas one had to pass through streets winding between giant heaps of rubble; one passed vigil candles in the city centre commemorating places of execution more or less every thousand meters. In time, the number of cinemas doubled and tripled, and is now close to the European average. But some commemorative plaques from the years of Nazi occupation remain. This may surprise the young European tourist but it can easily be explained. Nowhere else in Europe were innocent people executed in broad daylight on the streets of the city centre.

A Polish historian, Eugeniusz Cezary Król, notes that *the tragic events of World War II meant that for millions of Poles who survived the disaster every German, without exception, became the embodiment of the “absolute enemy” or the “scapegoat”*. For this reason, the trauma of the years 1939-1945 lent support to communist propaganda in Poland. People, coming to terms in this way with their horrendous experiences, willingly watched the cruel enemy being defeated at the cinema <sup>1</sup>. This statement, though generally true, requires some significant revision and additions. The first observation concerns the semantic scope. If in Polish film “every German without exception” has to embody the enemy, this primarily (or solely) concerns the German in a Nazi uniform. The ideological sanction was particularly strong in the first post-war pictures. This was most fully expressed in 1948 by an ex-Auschwitz prisoner, Wanda Jakubowska, in *Ostatni etap (The Last Stage)*, openly declaring the film’s goal: *to show the truth about Auschwitz and to arouse hatred for fascism* <sup>2</sup>. This was the case for many years after in popular film *minorum gentium*: the German in uniform was seen as an advocate of a murderous ideology. The second observation concerns the widespread cinematic image of the German. Awareness of the “cruel enemy having been defeated” very rarely translated into a description of that defeat. This is because Polish narratives of the war and the period of occupation do not manifest the triumph of revenge at all, but are in the great majority martyrological. Finally, there is a certain unacknowledged but important moment in the history of Polish cinema that had bearing on relations with Germany, which I would like to dwell upon here. It concerns the outstanding works of the Polish Film School created at the start of the second post-war decade.

The exponents of this movement, Andrzej Munk (born 1921), Andrzej Wajda (born 1926), and Kazimierz Kutz (born 1929), were too young to have participated

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\* The text of an address at the international conference “The Warsaw Uprising in the context of Polish-German relations” (Der Warschauer Aufstand im Kontext der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen), Warsaw, 30 March – 1 April 2007.

in the war. The first two, however, came into contact later with the underground Home Army, and the oldest, Munk, took part in the Warsaw Uprising. It was precisely the war, the occupation and the Uprising that formed for them the bond of generational experience. The rich literature on this subject draws our attention to the main directions and differences in artistic attitudes within the Polish Film School. Much less clear, however is the reflection on the moral genesis of these works. In his *Notatki z historii (Notes from History)* published in 1996, Wajda wrote: *We knew that we are the voice of our dead; that our duty is to testify about those who were better*<sup>3</sup>. This declaration leads us away from the previously quoted statement by Jakubowska and the somewhat exaggerated idea of the “absolute enemy” that Król attributed to Polish film narratives about the Germans. From the films that we recall here<sup>4</sup>, there emerges first a toothless enemy, and then a bodiless enemy. There is no place for the absolute enemy because the discussed films are part of the internal issues of a culture. The impulse for hatred also dies out. Wajda says that for him and his peers *the most poignant and painful feeling was the disappointment, which came from wasted hopes and wasted effort*<sup>5</sup>.

This syndrome of fruitless effort and futile sacrifice is inscribed in the structure of *Kanał (Canal)* (1956), the first film narrative about the Warsaw Uprising – a narrative in which, as was pointed out by a German critic, there was *not a trace of hatred for Germans*<sup>6</sup>. The destruction of an insurgent unit was depicted in symbolic language. Not only is the barred exit from the canal a sign of death, but so too is the exit that is open. *Darkness impenetrable and choking leaves a faint hope of salvation*<sup>7</sup>, while the brightness of day ruthlessly takes it away. Wajda’s vision was compared to the image of Dante’s hell. For some this vision was testimony to his artistic skill, for others a sign of escapism, since *the Warsaw Uprising remains in “Canal” an enigmatic creation, in which unknown forces destroy the people*<sup>8</sup>.

True, there is no mention of the Russians or the Germans. As regards the role of the former, Wajda was not allowed to utter a single word at that time; about the latter, he only said a word. In one of the last scenes of the film, the insurgent nicknamed “Wise” comes out of the canal, and finds himself eye to eye with the enemy, who takes the form of an over familiar Charon. We do not even know anything for sure about the nationality of this Polish-speaking hunter of valuables, a robber in German uniform. In the background are the corpses of execution victims. As much as this, only so much. It is a surprisingly succinct fragment of the cruel truth about the Uprising, which Władysław Bartoszewski<sup>9</sup>, the author of *The Chronicle of the Warsaw Uprising*, did not find then in the film, and which would only emerge in 2007 from the documentary scripts written for a film competition on the Uprising.

In contrast to the solemn *Canal*, the picture of the Warsaw Uprising in the first novella entitled *Scherzo alla Polacca* of Andrzej Munk’s 1957 film *Eroica*, is in keeping with realistic, and at times satirical, convention. There is no pathos here; patriotic slogans reverberate in the midst of prosaic daily life. This daily life is not always associated with battle, because the hero of the novella, the Warsaw rascal Dzikus Górkiewicz, does not espouse higher values but is simply trying to survive. On his path he almost never meets any Germans. The ones that he does meet are either tamed by the banality of life or invisible. There is a soldier looking like a depraved reservist, who awkwardly bars our hero’s way with a gun, then gladly lets him pass, accepting a wad of banknotes. There is another soldier who escorts



*Speed*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1959)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

a line of refugees from the Uprising, who makes Dżidzius help an elderly woman (in fact, unnecessarily). These are vestigial, civilian images of the toothless enemy. Their traces can be found in Kazimierz Kutz's film *Ludzie z pociągu* (*Night Train*) (1961): at a small train station Bahnschutz sips vodka with the stationmaster, sentimentalizing over the fate of his family, subjected to bombing in Hamburg. The murderous ideology has vanished somewhere, and with it the feeling of mortal danger. In place of the expected executioner–victim relationship appears a category of the fortuitous.

At the end of the war path, Polish survivors meet German marauders. In Munk's film, in which death is anonymous<sup>10</sup>, there are no more such personal images. High up in the sky a plane appears, to drop a few bombs on the city. The pilot, and his barely recognizable target, will remain unidentified too. Just like the crew of the tank that appears behind Dżidzius, as he gorges himself on alcohol above a clay pit pond. Too late to realize the danger, the terrified Górkiewicz falls in the water, begging for mercy. It is not impossible that in this famous parodic sequence the fear is reciprocated. The tank first appears as a giant, soundless ghost, and later on withdraws among the merry cackles of the Germans shut in it. They were lucky this time: the bottle thrown at them by the hero was not filled with petrol.

When the protagonists of *Ostinato lugubre*, the second novella of the same film, walk into a POW camp after the defeat of the Uprising, they are greeted for the first time in a long time with the form *Sie bitte* instead of *du Mensch* (as in another, ultimately not included in the film, novella *Zakonnica* /*The Nun*/, for example). The German superintendents are as always thorough, and polite as never before. One of them stands under a banner "Festival of Contemporary Music" and announces in quite good Polish: *So gentlemen – there will be a bath, uniforms and a search*. The Poles attribute this decency to the requirements of the Geneva Convention. One of them comments: *Strange people, these Germans. They burn people in ovens over there, and here they allow us to organize festivals*. This statement paradoxically finds confirmations in the film's finale. For a long time, the Polish prisoners were sustained by the legend of the heroic fugitive, Lieutenant Zawistowski, who in reality was hiding in the attic. When one day he dies, the officers in the know wish to keep the heroic legend alive. This strange idea, one of many of the Polish nation, can be realized thanks to the discreet help of the camp commander, a representative of the strange German nation.

*Eroica*, the flagship work of the Polish Film School, has met with much criticism over time. Raising the issue of heroism, confronting national mythology with wartime reality, the film inevitably became a source of controversy. We will put this to one side. For us, what is important is that the debate about the fate of Poland, taken on by Munk, has an autotelic character. It is probable that a discussion of such intensity would not have happened without the dramatic events of the war and occupation. And yet it takes place in an inner circle. Its intentional expression is the closed narrative structure of *Ostinato lugubre*, in which Germans remain outside its scope. The enemy wanders somewhere outside. He awakens memories of oppression but is not its necessary, and especially not its demonic, personification. Munk's film is not a tale of Polish martyrdom, blamed on the Germans. It talks about the problems of Polish consciousness, which came to light thanks to the war, just as at other times they were revealed by the plague. We have to deal with this by ourselves.

This attitude is equally clear in the film *Lotna (Speed)* by Wajda. This is one of the very few war films in the history of cinema to feature no enemy. In this movie from the September 1939 campaign, there are no Germans at all. They are not there because the battle episode of the cavalry squadron is part of the national mythology, one more chapter of the same, centuries-old saga of chivalry. The eponymous *Lotna* is a steed, which in the eyes of the foreign spectator becomes *the symbol of the Polish cavalryman's weapon; it represents the honour of its master and so his ideals of life and death*<sup>11</sup>. This great horse is a harbinger of death, just as Wajda's whole film is an elegy on the death of the old world of the gentry. I once wrote that the symbolic relationship between "Thanatos and Poland" was never more clearly revealed in Polish cinema as in *Speed*<sup>12</sup>.

And this is a very special relationship. A confrontation of the Polish lancers with the German armoured vehicles is inevitable, if we are to relate it to the ancient Sarmatian models of courage, selflessness, sacrifice, and incredible idea of a "handsome death". *You'll see a pretty charge of the lancers* – the gallant officer says to the lady of the manor, preparing himself and his comrades in arms for a hopeless battle that is to take place in a short while. This deeply internalized and symbolic cultural order has all the signs of self-destruction. The existence of the enemy remains beyond this closed universe. That is why the enemy is bodiless and the nationality of said enemy almost interchangeable. Anyhow, it is we, the Poles, who wrestle with our own virtues and vices, hopes and illusions, our own destiny.

And it does not have to come down to the manifestations of egotism. Aleksander Jackiewicz, the critic attached most strongly of all to the Polish School, wrote of a short novella *Pies (Dog)*, from Kazimierz Kutz's film *Krzyż Walecznych (Cross of Valor)* (1959), that *there never was on the Polish screen such a terrible brevity in conveying the relationships between nations, men, each other*<sup>13</sup>. This observation is still valid today. And all the more remarkable is that in this novella-like, miniature portrait of the Polish-German relations, there are no Germans at all. There is only the eponymous dog, found on the road in the final days of the war by three Polish sappers. They take in the Alsatian, as it is lost and stray. Soon, however, they regret this, for the dog's aggression against encountered former Auschwitz prisoners reveals his sinister origins: he probably belonged to an SS man. The discovery becomes the source of contention between the soldiers. One of them still sees the dog as a dog; the other two are ready to swear it is a Nazi hyena. Emotions rise. The members of this miniature anti-Hitler coalition deceitfully get rid of the dog's defender, in order to destroy the animal marked by crime. The soldier Buśko is finally close to administering justice. He stands in front of the dog and aims his gun at him. The dog – helpless or simply trustful – does not run away. However, at the decisive moment the finger does not pull the trigger. An invisible mysterious force drains the executioner of his strength. Probably because he realises he has an innocent animal in front of him. Or perhaps because he is aware he wanted to kill in this way a completely unknown to him, bodiless German.

If we tried to place these problems in an order of values, its contemporary understanding would prove deceptive. The phenomenon of the "bodiless enemy" cannot be recorded in the language of political correctness. Half a century ago, it was too early for the rationalization of the war conflict, and even more so for reconciliation. The discussed works do not propose an immediate reversal of symbols, do

not build the image of a “good German” in place of the negative stereotype. This is not yet the time of *Schindler’s List* or *The Pianist*. *Cross of Valor* is testimony to how hard it is to find empathy in the still smouldering rubble. The war hecatomb did not descend from the sky like a fireball, but resulted from someone’s specific intentions. That way of surviving the trauma is, however, extraordinary and momentous. It is not about revenge, but about spiritual recovery from the disaster. The dematerialization of the enemy does not come from forgiveness, but rather from a particular instinct of self-preservation. It seems to merge psychological needs with moral impulse. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin – as luck would have it, exactly eighty years ago – reflected on the nature of destruction. He distinguished between external and internal destructive forces. On external destruction – cataclysms, shocks, physical annihilation – we have no influence at all; on the other hand, when they end there is a chance we find ourselves in the world of the living.

*What is terrible for us – says Teilhard – is to be irretrievably cut off from things through some interior and irreversible diminishment. Humanly speaking, the internal passivities of diminishment form the darkest element and the most despairingly useless years of our lives* <sup>14</sup>.

It looks like Wajda, Munk and Kutz have intuitively tried to remove this element for their own and the common good. The fabric of their stories, relieved from boulders, cleaned from sand and mud, freed from what Teilhard called *diminishing experiences*, slowly and imperceptibly initiated a new consciousness. We can observe it years later. The noise of propaganda, as any noise, finally stops. The pure tone of art endures.

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<sup>1</sup> E. C. Król, *Wizerunek Niemca etnicznego w polskim filmie po II wojnie światowej*, “Przegląd Historyczny” 2005, vol. XCVI, no. 1.

<sup>2</sup> As cited in A. Madej, *Kino – władza – publiczność. Kinematografia polska w latach 1944-1949*, Bielsko-Biała 2002, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> A. Wajda, *Moje notatki z historii*, “Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1996/1997, no. 15-16, autumn – winter.

<sup>4</sup> I leave out the reflection on the reconstruction of the September 1939 events: *Wolne miasto (Free City)* (1958) and *Westerplatte* (1967) by Stanisław Różewicz. These films were intended as para-documentaries – the director of *Free City* even chose actors according to their resemblance to the defenders of Gdańsk Post Office.

<sup>5</sup> A. Wajda, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> W. Freisburger, “Die Welt”, 2.08.1958, as cited in A. Wajda, *Filmy*, Warszawa 1996, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> M. Martin, “Cinéma 58”, March 1958, as cited in: ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> B. Michałek, “Teatr i Film”, January 1957, as cited in: ibidem, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> W. Bartoszewski, “Stolica”, 9.06.1957, as cited in: ibidem, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup> This was pointed out by B. Stolarska in her essay *Zakładnicy nadziei*, “Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1997, no. 17.

<sup>11</sup> R. Prédal, “*Lotna*”, czyli bolesny obraz przemiany, “Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1996/1997, no. 15-16, autumn – winter.

<sup>12</sup> About this problem and more widely on the cultural background of *Speed*: R. Marszałek, *Filmowa pop-historia*, Kraków 1984, pp. 359-368.

<sup>13</sup> A. Jackiewicz, *Moja filmoteka. Kino polskie*, Warszawa 1983, p. 186.

<sup>14</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, transl. S. Cowell, Brighton 2004, p. 42.

# The Splendour of Male Relationship

Andrzej Wajda's *The Promised Land* as a buddy film

SEBASTIAN JAGIELSKI

*The Promised Land* (1974) is a masterpiece. A masterpiece that gave its director his first Oscar nomination and keeps leading various polls for the best Polish film of all times. However this masterpiece is a bit controversial. For two reasons: the first concerns the Polish, while the second the foreign reception of the film. In Poland cinema historians were bothered mainly by the question: whether *The Promised Land* – contrary to other Wajda's films – is a film flattering the authorities or secretly aiming against them? In the West, on the other hand, the critics noticed in the film anti-Semitic themes thus making it impossible for the film to reach international audience <sup>1</sup> (and allegedly also win the Oscar). The authorities quickly noticed that the film *had the appropriate ideological message* <sup>2</sup>, since it depicted *terrible exploitation of the working class, solidarity of capital, ideals and dedication to the cause of the representatives of the developing working class movement* <sup>3</sup>, so the work had to be used for propaganda purposes especially that Wajda's name was a strong recommendation <sup>4</sup>. At first the censorship issued an order not to publish critical reviews of the film. Then from the Department of Ideological and Educational Work of the Central Committee of PZPR a secret instruction came showing in what ways the communist authorities intended to use the fact that Wajda *chose his class side* <sup>5</sup> which in consequence was to *distance the director from the circles unfriendly towards the engaged art [and] bring it closer to our artistic and propaganda powerbase* <sup>6</sup>. Tadeusz Lubelski who analysed the film's reception noticed that *the Party critics defended Wajda's work from the attacks of Moczar nationalists from "Rzeczywistość" and "Ekran" who accused the creator of biased, anti-Polish approach*, while at the same time film magazines that were not an ideological speaking tube focussed solely on the work's artistic features <sup>7</sup>.

The political "fight for Wajda" which started in Poland had no significant influence on the reception of the film in the West where *The Promised Land* had to deal with the accusation of anti-Semitism. Anna Nehrebecka who among others with Andrzej Wajda, Wojciech Pszoniak and Bolesław Michałek participated in a press conference in Los Angeles preceding the Oscar ceremony recalls that event in the following way: *What was happening was for me at the same time terrifying and funny* <sup>8</sup>, because the problem of anti-Semitism in the film unexpectedly became the main motive of the meeting. Anglo-Saxon critics in their reviews focussed on the way national and ethnic minorities were depicted in the film. In the first place the portrait of the rich Jewess, Lucy Zucker (Kalina Jędrusik) proved problematic.

She was described by a critic from “New York Times” to be a particularly repulsive, piggish woman <sup>9</sup> (was this why in the reedited version of the film from 2000 the legendary erotic scene in the restaurant car was missing? <sup>10</sup>). These interpretations <sup>11</sup> in which *The Promised Land* appeared as an anti-Semitist work caused that in other films by Wajda (irrespective of the fact whether they were dedicated to the Jewish problems or not, see: witch-hunt against *Katyn*, 2007 in French press <sup>12</sup>) the critics looked for anti-Jewish content. So is *The Promised Land* a pro-government (anti-capitalist) or an oppositionist film (criticising in form of a costume drama the consumerism of the Gierek era)? Is it an anti-Semitist or anti-Polish film? Not forgetting these “discrepancies” that threaten to disintegrate Wajda’s work from the inside, I would like to analyse the problem of pan-national male homosocial community depicted here and created by the Jew – Moryc Welt (Wojciech Pszoniak), German – Maks Baum (Andrzej Seweryn) and Pole – Karol Borowiecki (Daniel Olbrychski) and which in the analyses of *The Promised Land* was usually pushed to the background, with the focus on other aspects of the work (adaptation, painting inspirations, political and nationalist context).

### Buddy film

*Andrzej Wajda – wrote Tadeusz Lubelski – had to destroy Reymont’s fiction in the script in order to save the friendship of the three protagonists. (...) In a film of the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century similar plot [betrayal of male friendship] would have no sense since it would not correspond to the mores of the era. This was the late phase of the era of dissent* <sup>13</sup>. The fact that the climate of dissent was not unfamiliar to Wajda is proven by his countercultural in spirit film made in FRG, *Pilatus and others* (1971) based on Bulhakov’s *The Master and Margarita*, and also by the American version of *Demons* with Meryl Streep and Elżbieta Czyżewska that the director was preparing right after completing work on *The Promised Land*, which particularly emphasised the generation gap so the performance could be interpreted precisely from the perspective of rebellion <sup>14</sup>. When Wajda was working on *The Promised Land* he wanted the actors to *create three friends reminding us of countercultural ideas* <sup>15</sup>. The director, always sensitive and attentive to the changes of modern cinema, also this time adapted the literary original to the concerns of the world cinema of the time. His inspirations came mostly from American cinema <sup>16</sup> whose *deep message* was at the time *savouring the taste of male solidarity* <sup>17</sup>.

In short, in order to tell us about male friendship Wajda referred to the American films marked by rebellion, especially to the so-called *buddy films*. The notion of a buddy film was coined to describe the wave of American films from the 70s which focussed in the first place on male (romantic) friendship. Buddy films are treated by the cinema historians either as a separate film genre or as a fictional element of other genres. Robin Wood dates the birth of this genre to 1969 in which three famous buddy films had their cinema premiers (*Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid* by George Roy Hill, *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper and *Midnight Cowboy* by John Schlesinger), they were the model for subsequent films made according to the same pattern (e.g. *Scarecrow*, 1973, by Jerry Schatzberg; *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, 1974, by Michael Cimino; *California Split*, 1974, by

Robert Altman)<sup>18</sup>. The genesis of buddy films was usually associated with the rise of feminism in the 70s seeing in these films a kind of counteraction to the women's freedom movement. According to Molly Haskell feminism made it possible for the filmmakers to eliminate women from the film narrative which from now on could be dedicated solely to men's things, men's values and men's... passions. So it was not without reason that the feminists were the first to take up the problem of meaning of male bonds in buddy films, the films which – according to them – solely strengthened the power of male hegemony<sup>19</sup>. Haskell, following the notion of a buddy system suggested by Leslie Fiedler in the field of literature, notices that what strikes in the relations between men depicted in American films is their emotional intensity which, however, cannot be reduced solely to sexual desire. *Rather, the point is love – love in which men understand and support each other, speak the same language, and risk their lives to gain each other's respect. But this is also a delusion; the difficulties that adventures bring, disguise the fact that this is the easiest of loves: a love that is adolescent, presexual, tacit, the love of one's "semblable", one's mirror reflection*<sup>20</sup>. Even though Haskell clearly states that buddy films are not about homosexuality, she also notices that they are streaked with it. The echo of these deliberations can be found in the book by the Polish film critic, Maria Kornatowska who analyses such films as *Butch Cassidy and Sundance Kid*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *Scarecrow* or *Easy Rider* in the chapter dedicated to homosexuality, in which she sees in these films *parahomosexual perception of the world*<sup>21</sup>. Kornatowska, however, when interpreting these films does not refer to the notion of buddy films, even though her interpretation reminds one of the interpretation offered by Molly Haskell: *In the stories of fight and unlimited, free spaces there is no place for women (...). The protagonist is usually a wanderer, without a home or family, a stranger, eternal vagabond, going from nowhere to nowhere. The sole companion on the road can be another man as a second I, a mirror reflection, a kind of a double*<sup>22</sup>.

However Richard Dyer<sup>23</sup> warns us against the danger of seeing in the convention of buddy films solely a smokescreen for the homosexual desire. Of course, this convention uses the same strategies that were used by directors in the era of the Hays Code in order to hide the homoerotic potential of the film narrative. This, however, does not mean that these conventions always function in cinema in the same way. Dyer, analysing the film by Franklin J. Schaffner *Papillon* (1973), emphasises those conventions of buddy films which are aimed at marking the relation between men as love-related but not necessarily sexual: in the first place, when telling us about love between Papillon (Steve McQueen) and Dega (Dustin Hoffman) the director reaches for formal structures which are usually used in cinema to show heterosexual love, secondly, men never say what they really feel for each other and thirdly, their love is clearly distinguished from homosexual desire; for that reason the director introduces an episodic figure of a homosexual, Maturette (Robert Deman), in order to secure himself against attributing homosexual desire to Papillon and Dega and to let us, the spectators, understand what their relation surely is not homosexual<sup>24</sup>. Even though it is fascinating that in the 70s, American mainstream cinema balanced so dangerously on the border of what in relations between men is sexual and not sexual, it would be a mistake to mechanically attribute hidden homoerotic desire to every buddy film.

### The splendour of male relationship

Robin Wood, similarly to Richard Dyer, claims that considering buddy films to be masks for gay films is too simple and in fact misleading. Suggestion that the protagonists of these films are homosexual, but the films cannot admit that is based on the – fundamental for patriarchy – binary division into hetero- and homo-. Wood notices further, and his argumentation strays from Dyer's deliberations, that if men's desire for men may be considered a mask for homosexuality then due to directors' strenuous attempts aimed at denying the central relation the homoerotic character, such a suggestion becomes actually possible<sup>25</sup>. This contradictory economy of desire is interesting: the more these films deny the homoerotic tension in male relations, the more they support it. Why was it in the 70s – continues Wood – that so many buddy films were made? Why were these films so successful? And why this type of films did in fact disappear from the cinemas in the 80s? Buddy films which were made in the first place by men and with (heterosexual) men in mind referred on the one side, to their hostility towards women, usually interpreted as men's counteraction to the development of feminism, but on the other hand they referred to the subconsciousness of male spectators: they expressed the strong need for male love at the same time testing its correctness. *However one may regret the strategies of disownment – according to Robin Wood – the films would admittedly be unthinkable without them: the heterosexual male spectator's satisfaction would quickly be replaced by panic, and the films' commercial viability would instantly disintegrate*<sup>26</sup>. It is significant that cinema historians usually start their essays on buddy films with masculine films from the 70s and end with analyses of gay films from the 80s, claiming that the convention of buddy films was absorbed at the time by gay cinema. True, buddy films are streaked with homoeroticism, but surely they are not gay films. In the first place they differ because in buddy films male love cannot be consumed, often due to the most effective obstacle which is death of at least one of the men<sup>27</sup>. Mark Simpson wrote about it in an interesting way in his essay *Don't Die on My Buddy: Homoeroticism and Masochism in War Movies* dedicated to war buddy films. In these films death is a sacrament: *it makes love between men eternal by removing it from the male body; by cancelling forever the threat of its consummation it ensures that boyish love is immortal, and that queer love, transformed into a cadaver, is buried on the battlefield*<sup>28</sup>.

*The Promised Land* was made in 1974 when buddy films were the most popular. The relation of three friends with its emotional intensity resembles male relations from the American movies but it is not only the male love that allows us to include this work in the category of buddy films. Robin Wood<sup>29</sup> set six categories of a model buddy narrative: (1) journey (usually from the outskirts to the city), (2) marginalisation of women, (3) absence of a home, (4) male love, (5) figure of an overt homosexual as amendment, (6) death. In *The Promised Land* we have all of Wood's categories apart from the last one (unless we understand death more broadly as disaster): (1) first scenes transfer us from the idealised and poeticised, due to the overexposed texture of photos, mansion in Kurów to the monstrous, diabolic city-monster; (2) women excluded from male community are not figures of equal standing but signs connoting specific (anti)values: Anka (Anna Nehrebecka) symbolising Polishness, is the "pure" lady from the manor who is clearly contra-

dicted by the eroticised *femme fatale*, Lucy Zucker; (3) Karol who calls his father (Tadeusz Białoszczyński) *mummified nobility*, already in the initial scene says that he has to free himself from tradition because these bonds restrict and chafe him; also Maks frees himself from the family past and Moryc is already completely uprooted; (4) male love in the degenerated world seized by the pursuit of wealth is the only and the most valuable value: men are not only loyal to each other, not only do they support themselves but they also cannot live without each other; they are able to sacrifice their patrimonies, fiancés and their ideals for career but not their male love which will survive the hardest test; (5) the figure of a homosexual also appears in *The Promised Land* but it has a different function than in American buddy films, the director not only does not deny the homoerotic element in the male relation but (almost) directly attributes homosexual orientation to Moryc; (6) even though Wajda saves his protagonists he closes the film with a disaster which forces them to start everything afresh. In light of the above *The Promised Land* seems a buddy film *par excellence*.

### The anatomy of male homosocial desire <sup>30</sup>

Actors who acted out the male romance in front of the camera so well: Daniel Olbrychski and Wojciech Pszoniak defended Wajda's work from accusations of anti-Semitism or anti-Polishness arguing that this was a film about something else, that is about male friendship. *There are a few caricatures of Jews* – explained Olbrychski – *there is the Pole, Wilczek, bastard in relation to the Jewish poor who at the beginning of the film sings off key: "O polska krainooo..."; there is Borowiecki swearing on Madonna's picture; there is the blood sucker Bucholc; there is a lum-mox and nouveau riche Müller; there is another German, lecher and depraver played by Zapasiewicz. (...) And still this is a film in the first place about friendship, the key to the film are the three boys who shaking their hands say: "I have nothing, you have nothing, he has nothing so together we have just enough to have the biggest factory in the city in a year". It is not by chance that this male trio includes: a Jew, a Pole and a German* <sup>31</sup>. The actor is supported by Wojciech Pszoniak: *For me "The Promised Land" has been a story of a friendship of a Pole, a Jew and a German in the nineteenth century capital of industry, in the world of great wealth and equally great poverty* <sup>32</sup>. The more astute critics did not miss the specificity of the structure of the male friendship in Wajda's film. *This friendship and solidarity* – wrote Konrad Eberhardt – *is as a challenge to the wolf pack. We have to admit that in the film, this motive became more beautiful especially due to the nuances added by Wojciech Pszoniak to Moryc whom he awarded with charm, warmth and gentleness. (...) in "The Promised Land", the blaze from this exceptional, youthful relation, even though it cannot dispel the darkness, still constitutes a heart-warming offer for humanisation of the wolfish relations. It is an, obviously, naive offer – but in the world depicted by "The Promised Land" namely naivety seems something priceless and human* <sup>33</sup>. The critic describes male friendship as an *unusual youthful relation*, hence different from stereotype male relations. It seems that Eberhardt aptly sensed the essence of the "triangle" which on screen presents itself as an unthreatened idyll, dream of male solidarity and closeness, dream in which the fear of stigmatisation and exclusion does not exist.

The initial sequence in Kurów, land estate of Borowiecki family – where Karol visits with Maks and Moryc and where Karol's father and Karol's fiancé, Anka, live – introduces us into the ambiguous relations between the protagonists. The erotic tension, surprisingly, does not occur as we could expect between Karol and Anka but is placed outside the relationship sanctified by tradition. When Anka runs out of the mansion and runs towards the men sitting in the garden she is watched in awe not by Karol but by Maks. In order for the spectator not to have any doubts about the nature of this look the camera carefully follows its trajectory: first it moves slowly towards Maks's face and then frames it in a close-up. The next take which shows the protagonists in a long shot allows us to see that the man is watched by Moryc and the expression on his face leaves no doubt, he is aware that his friend is enchanted by the fiancé of their Polish friend. Welt unmistakably guesses Maks's desire since he himself is not without fault. His desire, however, is not towards Anka whom he ignores and pays no attention to, but towards Karol at whom he looks as at a picture. Thus desire in the initial scene is placed not where we would expect it: the Polish engaged couple is the object of the desire of strangers: the Jew and the German<sup>34</sup>. This dangerous desire, desire which it would seem could threaten the male friendship and destabilise bonds in the homosocial group, in fact stabilises these bonds, strengthens and tightens them. This happens because this desire never reaches sovereignty. It keeps oscillating between disclosure and suppression. It has to remain forever unfulfilled or as Wood and Simpson would have it – unconsummated. Maks and Moryc cannot find the courage to do anything more than silent worship, hidden love, obvious but unspoken. Let us look closer at the opening scenes in which the desire is set in motion: the theatre sequence and preceding scene locate the men against women and demonstrate their radical separation from them, on the other hand the scenes taking place in their flat give us a portrait of male house in its structure resembling not so much *Männerhaus* but a rebellious commune – these scenes locate the male community against patrimony and tradition.

Female figures in Andrzej Wajda's cinema, according to Piotr Lis, *function usually as a sign of a certain situation, similarly as in westerns the daughter of the magistrate judge is not so much an autonomous figure but a prize that the protagonist receives after defeating the bandits*<sup>35</sup>. Women in Wajda's early works are not rightful figures, they do not undergo metamorphoses before our eyes, they do not evolve in the course of action. From the first to the last scene they are immobilised – as beautiful insects in amber – women-symbols. Dorota from *The Generation* (1954) is *an ideal girl from Gwardia Ludowa*, Ewa from *Speed* (1959) personifies the stereotype of *a soldier's fiancé*, Krystyna from *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958) is a catalyst for Maciek's actions<sup>36</sup>. In *The Promised Land* – after a slightly misogynist stage at the turn of the 1960s (*Hunting Flies*, 1969; *Brzezina*, 1970) and still before meeting Krystyna Janda who opened in Wajda's career the phase of strong female characters – he returns to his beginnings. In this film there are no women, there are only women-symbols, women-monsters or women-objects. The range of female types is presented by the famous, daring theatre sequence where we are dealing with a multiplied portrait of a rich urban woman. In the theatre the attention of spectators does not focus on the artistic programme but on lounges where the proper performance takes place. The protagonists' attention circles around women

and money. Or in fact: women who have money. They survey the nouveau riche women, covered in jewels, ugly, kitschy and vulgar, without charm and style. Maks notices that *it smells like millions* and Karol astutely replies: *rather like onion and garlic*. Men do not spare the women: one looks as a *pink, plucked goose*, another has entire *jeweller's warehouse on her*. Only Lucy Zucker enchants with her sex appeal. She enchants Karol and Maks, but not Moryc who sees in her solely her diamonds. Her attractive body does not exist for him, because in women he sees only objects of transactions. About Mada Müller (Bożena Dykiel) who values herself at fifty thousand roubles per year, he says: *A strong girl, I would go into this business myself*, what Karol comments with a sneering smile. Moryc is one of these pre-emancipation homosexuals whose desire is defined by rejection of women as sexual objects. In a vivid orgy sequence at Kessler's (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz) that Wajda added to Reymont's novel, a naked woman approaches Moryc. Nervously he throws away his glass. His smiling face freezes in the grimace of disgust. As if he was getting ready for a battle which awaits him. And in fact: he brutally slaps the woman and pushes her away with contempt. Welt is afraid of the threatening female Eros which makes him aggressive towards women. But Karol and Maks contrary to appearances do not treat women in a better way – they completely objectify women. In the theatre the Pole starts flirting with Lucy Zucker only when he notices that she has a secret telegram accessible solely to the tycoons of the Łódź textile industry. So the man's orgasm in the scene in the carriage does not come as a result of sexual satisfaction but thanks to the promise of future profits. For the protagonists it is not women that are exciting but their money. For that reason Borowiecki will not hesitate to leave his fiancé when she stands in his way to wealth. He marries the rich Mada Müller for money.

In *The Promised Land* the rich women of Łódź are women-commodities while the Polish girl was awarded the role of a woman-symbol. Anka is an ideal personification of Polishness. We get to know her when she runs out of the manor with which she is identified. She has blond hair and blue eyes. Her young body is sealed in a long, neat, buttoned up dress. It is characteristic that Anka is loved by Karol only when she is absent (and once she finally appears the relationship falls apart with a bang). Hence she usually materialises in (male) memory. As in the scene preceding the theatre sequence. We are dealing with a kind of striptease of Borowiecki-Olbrychski, a striptease whose sole spectator is another man – Maks. Karol slowly takes off subsequent pieces of clothing while reading a love letter from Anka. The narrative suddenly stops and the attention of the spectator (diegetic and cinema) is directed towards the man's body. A kind of erotic game between the protagonists starts. It seems that the male spectator causes the eroticism and intensifies it, that Borowiecki offers the erotic performance with Maks in mind. But why does he expose his body additionally intensifying the erotic tension with love phrases? Why does Karol decide to make this erotic performance? It is not in order to seduce Maks but rather in order to make sure that the German is really interested in Anka. Every time Karol looks at Maks he avoids his eyes clearly ashamed as caught red-handed. The Pole upon leaving the room intentionally leaves the letter on the table and Maks unflinchingly reaches for it observed by Borowiecki – with satisfaction – from the other room. So the German rose to the bait. The certainty regarding Maks's feelings, however, does not weaken their friendship. Why?



*The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)



*The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)

When the protagonist in a male gesture touches his naked torso, reading exalted confessions about roses that Anka received from him, eroticism of the scene dangerously increases. This erotic look is relieved by a retrospective interrupting this performance and showing Anka in a nostalgic light running out of the mansion, man's body in the cinema cannot be directly marked as an object of covetous contemplation of another man. Eroticised manhood seen with an eye of another man is channelled in the image of an appropriate object of desire (a woman). Thus it was not Karol's body that aroused Maks' desire but the initiated by the love letter memory of Anka. However, the memory of innocent femininity quickly disappears and Maks's lustful look, instead of her body, examines the naked body of her fiancé<sup>37</sup>. It seems that this complicated, seemingly marginal scene, appears not so much in order for Karol to become sure of Maks's feelings for Anka but to saturate the picture with male eroticism. Especially that this scene has no fictional consequences. Woman once again proves to be only a pretext. She is a midwife of desire which remains closed within male community. Hence women fulfil in *The Promised Land* two functions: commodity of male exchange (Mada Müller, Lucy Zucker) and medium of male closeness (Anka). On their own they do not count at all. Male homosocial desire constitutes itself in *The Promised Land* as much in opposition to women as in opposition to family, patrimony and tradition – problems considered the most important in Andrzej Wajda's work whose symbolic function – as the director often underlined – is to honour the memory of the fallen fathers. *[It] translates to a certain extent – as Christopher Caes wrote – to the inability to go beyond the role of a son. Instead, the spectacle (death) of the father (that son's cinema is about) in a way permanently attracts the son's look. The father's death has consolidated Wajda's generation in the role of sons*<sup>38</sup>. The American Slavic expert associates this process with the oedipal complex<sup>39</sup> and Elżbieta Ostrowska follows in his footsteps: *Since (...) the "son" cannot disobey the father, the process of becoming a man in a certain sense has to be postponed. Maybe this explains why most of male protagonists in Wajda's films are "boys" (...). "Boys" so still "not-men" without fully formed identity, also sexual identity, still under the parents' law which in Polish conditions was codified by the Romantic tradition under such notions as country, honour, freedom, sacrifice, duty*<sup>40</sup>. Hence *The Promised Land* is in Wajda's work a special film, because here the son disobeys the father. The father in a fierce speech accuses the son of abandoning the national ethos: *You all laugh at the past. You call the tradition a corpse, nobility a superstition and virtue – a prejudice. You sold your souls to the golden calf*. However we are not dealing here solely with the conflict: noble tradition versus *the golden calf* but also and maybe in the first place – the national community versus the pan-national male community. Borowiecki rejects the family tradition, which in consequence leads to his exclusion from the national community. He chooses *the golden calf* and male community. Starting the "business" with Mada Müller he sells himself in an obvious way, but is it not how he manages to save the male love? Not without reason Moryc encourages him to leave Anka and marry (for the money) the German. He knows that marriage with the Pole would destroy their male "triangle" while relation with Mada would be a pure transaction. Moryc would have his beloved for himself. Borowiecki, as it seems, had to sell himself in order for the love "triangle" to survive. Some cinema historians claim, however, that this male community does

not carry with it any positive values. According to Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska *Wajda depicts the actual void of their [Moryc's, Karol's and Maks's] life led by one idea – getting money, the sole mechanism initiating their dynamic energy*<sup>41</sup>. If the protagonists were only after money would they act on loyalty? Why does Borowiecki not accept the better offer from Bucholc (Andrzej Szalawski) and Moryc from Kessler and Grünspan (Stanisław Igar)? Why when the factory by Karol's fault is on fire the men do not part in disagreement? Again answers to these questions can be found in the scenes which are marginal for the plot itself.

Moryc enters their flat with Karol on his arms. When he crosses the doorstep they hear voices from Maks's alcove. Men look interested into the room and then Moryc – having seen a naked woman in the German's arms – quickly heads with disconsolate Karol towards another room. Borowiecki falls into a short nap and Moryc kneels in front of him as in prayer. He lifts his dreamy face to him as if expecting a kiss. Contemplating the Pole's body Welt reveals his new face – his lyrical side<sup>42</sup>. A moment later men fill the flat with their freed corporeality: Moryc looks out of the bathroom naked, Karol proudly carries his naked torso, finally, not seeing anything inappropriate in it, he enters Maks' room while he is still having sex, and Maks does not protest at all. This freedom of customs, freed corporeality, free love and lack of any self-consciousness are characteristic rather for rebellious communes than Polish mores at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The protagonists reject the standards of interpersonal life choosing another lifestyle, style which distances them from the family, past and tradition. However, does this film sequence taken from a dissent movie show the void and moral decay of men? Can we overlook that these men are capable of dedication, tenderness, love (but – in fact – only towards other men)? That the streaked with eroticism male relation is the source of their dynamic energy?

The sequence taking place in their flat is preceded by a scene just after the orgy at Kessler's. Karol gives the drunken Moryc a secret message about the increase of custom duty on cotton, the message sobers the latter up within seconds. He covers Karol in kisses and jumps at him, embracing him with his thighs on his waist. *So we can – says Welt – give each other a kiss now*, as he was looking for an occasion to get closer to the Pole. What is interesting Borowiecki does not seem bothered by this effusive tenderness, on the contrary – it makes him laugh and it flatters him. Also in other scenes Karol, but also Maks, are surprisingly sensitive towards Moryc. When greeting him or saying goodbye they kiss him on the forehead even though they do not offer similar gestures towards each other. This tenderness towards Moryc seems decisive for their male relation. It is the Jew who seals the male homosocial group. Behind him – as opposed to Karol and Maks – there is no centuries-old family tradition. He comes from a poor family (in fact we know that his mother is related to Grünspan but the latter has never helped her so she was forced to trade on the market) with which he cut all the contacts. He is uprooted. Apart from Maks's and Karol's friendship he has nothing. It is thanks to him that the German and the Pole distance themselves from their families and national communities and head towards the (double) Other. And the Other is always outside, far from what is collective (no matter whether national, ethnic or class). It is significant that Welt feels uneasy both in Kurów, where he has to chase away the dogs and in Łódź where he has to fight to stay afloat. He wants male tenderness, closeness and

love which Karol and Maks offer to him being propelled by it themselves. *Somebody had to hit him a few times with a whip* – Wojciech Pszoniak used to say about his protagonist – *brutally reject him as the dirty Jew because he has in him both the pain and distrust and at the same time dreams it was different, he wants to cross the border, he wants to be seen as a man, human being and not as a typical specimen of an ethnic group or race. He loves Borowiecki. (...) Have you ever been at the asylum for homeless dogs? They are afraid of men but at the same time long for human love. And this was the Welt I created*<sup>43</sup>. Under the thick skin Moryc hides fragility that his friends instinctively feel and answer to. With tenderness.

The motive of male community streaked with eroticism leads to another contradiction which makes the film's national narrative explode from the inside. On the one side Wajda idealises the gentry manor, scenes taking place there are saturated with nostalgia (overexposed frames, wistful waltz) on the other hand – maybe against the director's intentions – incredible light, as astutely noticed by Eberhardt, emanates from the male relation assigned to the monstrous urban space. The rural world is so ideal that it is untrue. The protagonists make an impression of ghosts from the past, ones for whom there is no future. Meanwhile life pulsates in the murky and immoral Łódź-monster where Anka and Borowiecki's father, full of honesty and goodness, will not be able to find their way. The artificiality of the Kurów motive being a kind of visual shortcut depicting the mythical world located in the past is additionally intensified by the lack of authenticity in the way relation between Karol and Anka is presented, devoid of emotions, passion, and life (they love each other when they are not together). Hence the film is divided into two motives: the heterosexual national and the homosocial saturated with male eroticism. Borowiecki could not be a part of the national community while being at the same time a part of the stigmatised by Otherness multinational, homosocial community which carries with it openness to sexual diversity – this does not fit within the national discourse. It is impossible to reconcile – as Gombrowicz has once noted – national community personified by the “pure” lady from the manor and equally virtuous (and beautiful) Pole, with homosexuality which (allegedly) is foreign to the Polish national identity. Even though national community is idealised by Wajda, the homosocial community is not presented as a dangerous, destructive or evil power. Multinational male homo-community offers an alternative to the family and national life. Thus in *The Promised Land* the outgoing patriotic ethos clashes with the developing, diverse, future-oriented and representing modernity, community<sup>44</sup>. The ending of the film suggests that the director unambiguously chose the national community: Karol who chooses the male community and not the national one has to be punished for the betrayal of the national ethos. However, it is the full of life male relation that emanates light...

### **Ideal body and anti-body**

Hayden White in the text *Bodies and Their Plots* wrote, *that changes and transmutation can be braced across different parameters of time and space. Moreover a history – any history, any kind of history – in order to create and identify the body whose “story” it would tell, must postulate, if only implicitly, some kind of anti-body, an anomalous or pseudo-body. This anti-body marks the limit or horizon*

that the normative body, in the process of its development, evolution, or change may not cross without ceasing to be a body proper and degenerating into a condition of bodilessness<sup>45</sup>. In *The Promised Land* the normative body, the ideal body, is Karol's body while the body of Moryc is the body-anomaly, the anti-body. The body of Borowiecki is sensual and beautiful while Moryc's body is hysterical. Heterosexual Pole of noble roots personifies the norm negated by the uprooted homosexual Jew. What is interesting, male pairs in American buddy films are created according to the principle of similar binary oppositions. They are composed of tough and (more or less) effeminate men. The male one was either John Voight (*Midnight Cowboy*), Gene Hackman (*Scarecrow*) or Steve McQueen (*Papillon*), the soft one – usually Dustin Hoffman (*Midnight Cowboy*, *Papillon*) or Al Pacino (*Scarecrow*). In an analogous way in Wajda's film the male is Olbrychski, and the effeminate – Pszoniak, however, with one difference that in American buddy films those effeminate men were never, as in *The Promised Land*, marked as homosexual.

According to Tadeusz Lubelski *the dramatic figure of Olbrychski came from the collective subconsciousness of Poles. This was a protagonist that had to appear in the public discourse if the collective psychotherapy offered by a film from the Polish school was to prove effective. And the fact that Olbrychski's dramatic type occurred, at least for a few years, and in full light, confirmed that the Polish school fulfilled its role as a psychotherapist. The passage through the bitter-tragic experience of reliving one more time the defeats of the protagonists from "Canal" and "Eroica" was necessary in order for the protagonist of "The Deluge" and "The Promised Land" to appear; Cybulski was necessary for Olbrychski to appear*<sup>46</sup>. Hence Olbrychski was an awaited actor. Active, dynamic, passionate and monumentally beautiful. Devoid of intellectual dilemmas, reflectiveness or pain of uncertainty. Lubelski in the actor's screen image saw *a noble knight, observing the rules of the code of honour, ready to defend the weak and fight for the honour of the Holy Lady and at the same time not falling into the ridicule of national megalomania*<sup>47</sup>. *The Promised Land* brings the reverse of the image of a Polish knight. Borowiecki is a demoted knight. Daniel Olbrychski before taking the role, however, was not afraid that he was to play a negative character. He was afraid of something else – that this was not a spectacular character. Borowiecki's role appeared in his career right after historical performances in Jerzy Hoffman's *Colonel Wolodyjowski* (1969) and *The Deluge* (1974) in which the actor got used to wide gesture and male attributes: horse and sabre. And in *The Promised Land* the sabre is just a decoration at the manor in the estate of a Polish nobleman, where one goes riding almost solely for romantic trips. So when Andrzej Wajda offered Olbrychski the role of Borowiecki he was to wring his hands and say helplessly: *I have nothing to play. There is no role here*<sup>48</sup>. The actor was and was not right at the same time.

Borowiecki, despite being very active, dynamic, resourceful and organised and even though he consistently aspires to the set goal, is a monolith-figure. Spectacular nature of this figure is not related to action, narrative, activity but solely to his existence. In Hoffman's films Olbrychski was noble and knightly, in Zanussi's – bound, in Kutz's – ideal. However, he was incredibly beautiful, only in Wajda's work. Especially in *The Promised Land* where, it seems, he exists solely in order to be loved. And in fact – he is loved, desired and admired. By the camera, spectators, finally other characters of the film (irrespective of their sex). Just like the orig-

inal title *Lotna* – the object of desire of all men – in another of Wajda’s films. The eyes of men and women are a mirror in which Karol may watch himself. This figure is seen through the prism of desire, a figure-image. The body of Daniel Olbrychski functions here as an erotic object. In the cinema usually women are presented as images to be watched. Beautiful and static. In the classic text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* Laura Mulvey writes that *the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like*<sup>49</sup>. Andrzej Wajda bravely challenged this rule of the mainstream cinema. In *The Promised Land* but also in his other films (especially *Canal*, 1956; *Speed* or *Man of Marble*, 1976), *the fetishistic gaze is captivated by what it sees, does not wish to inquire further; to see more, to find out*<sup>50</sup>, the gaze embraces the male body. Never women’s: the sensuality of Wajda’s films is erotic but it is the eroticism of men not women. And desire rarely occurs between male protagonists, usually this is desire connecting the male protagonist with (male) spectators contemplating his beauty<sup>51</sup>. Thus in *The Promised Land* (and in Wajda’s cinema in general) men look with admiration at other men (for example Maks looks at Karol) more often, however, the director tries to arouse similar admiration in (male) spectator looking at the male protagonist. Borowiecki’s body is an ideal body that overawes other men (Maks) and rouses desire of both women (Anka, Zucker, Mada Müller) and men (Moryc). The way Olbrychski’s body functions in *The Promised Land* is well illustrated by the scene of conversation with Kessler-Zapasiewicz, the scene taking place during the orgy in his gardens. Closed in a stylish, well-cut tailcoat and cylinder Olbrychski’s body is stylised and powdered while Zapasiewicz’s body is the opposite: we can see drops of sweat on his tired face. We see Olbrychski’s face lit with a strong spotlight in a close-up, carefully following its every twitch. While Zapasiewicz is presented on American shot with a minor worker deprived by him with a wreath on her head by his side. When Kessler says that the Pole is characterised by nobleness, skill and reading we, the spectators, see how he becomes more beautiful before our eyes, his beauty becomes more ravishing: he closes his eyes and smiles seductively. The German continues, however, that this nobleness and skill are just platitudes since Borowiecki is bankrupt. Then the Pole opens his eyes widely and full of lofty pride, but still charming and seductive, says decisively: *If a pig thought about an eagle it would think in a similar way*. Of course the stage design makes this zoological comparison visible to us.

Olbrychski’s corporeality is so incredible because it combines the phallic power and female charm. According to Adam Hanuszkiewicz it was Daniel Olbrychski that acted in *The Promised Land in the manner most typical of film*<sup>52</sup>. This “manner” – straight from classical Hollywood cinema – transforms Olbrychski into an ideal fetish. So it is not true that the mainstream cinema was not able to create conventions which would allow the directors to present men’s body in the similar way as Sternberg presented Dietrich’s<sup>53</sup>. Andrzej Wajda presented Olbrychski’s body precisely in the way in which female beauty was presented in cinema. Thus the director, not for the first time, completely ignores the cinematic rule pursuant to which male body may not be designated as the object of erotic contemplation (e.g. erotic scene in the restaurant car), may not become an object of erotic look of another man (e.g. the above-analysed scene of male striptease). Mulvey notices that a woman in the cinema is *a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented*

by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look<sup>54</sup>. Hence the author wrongly refuses the male figure the status of a spectacular object to watch. This is precisely what Borowiecki is, he is a perfect product and his aestheticised, stylised and fragmented body is the content of the film.

Probably for that reason the critics had greatest reservations in respect of the structure of this character that seemed to them not complicated enough. Aleksander Ledóchowski complained that this was *a one-dimensional figure, and in this meaning incomplete. Maybe it lacks hesitation, breakdowns, conflicts, desperation, trace of tragedy? Or the opposite – there is nothing that would make this figure greater, demonic, gave it superhuman dimension*<sup>55</sup>. Piotr Skrzypczak noticed that Borowiecki is an automaton speaking through tight lips and this effect was created by the fact that he was in permanent suppression of his primal, innate vitality and the acquired acting type<sup>56</sup>. Borowiecki is one-dimensional and static (even though in permanent movement), he is also characterised by a specific automatism, but it is precisely the automatism, static and one-dimensional nature that characterises the majority of film icons (mainly female) in the classical Hollywood cinema. He, just like them, was reduced to the dimension of a fetish. And Olbrychski's protagonist is a special fetish. He is an internally contradictory – once again! – character or better a character contradictory is his corporeality, since on the one side, what is characteristic for male figures, he is the perpetrator driving the film narrative and on the other – in a way typical for the existence of female figures in cinema – he was marked as a spectacular object to watch and desire. This contradiction is demonstrated best by the famous erotic scene in the restaurant car which at the same time offers the image of phallic and passive love. Naked Karol lies indifferently with his hand behind his head and Lucy Zucker eats, drinks and kisses him in spasm. Once again Wajda reverses the traditional division into male activity and female passivity. Jędrusik is passionate, lascivious and bodily and the man is beautiful and seductive. This is additionally emphasised by eroticising the male body movement of the camera moving over Karol's naked body from waist (loins) up (it is worth adding that we cannot attribute this look to the lover and thus justify and neutralise its dangerous character). By the way, in a similar way were created the scenes with Moryc. Karol (the object of desire) is immovable, phallic and static while Welt (the desiring) runs around his loved one, jumps and dances. Why is Borowiecki's body closer to the female than male fetish? Why is his existence associated with aestheticised female beauty and not severe and rough dominating masculinity? Because, as it seems, Wajda does not hide, as American directors did, that male body is eroticised here, that it is an object. In *The Promised Land* he usually does not use any tricks that would transform the eroticism of the male body, channel it or mediate it, in other words, disarm its subversive potential and make it fully safe. Wajda in a bold way demonstrates almost openly this feminised and fetishised – but paradoxically not deprived of its phallic power – ideal beauty of the male body.

If Karol Borowiecki is the essence of masculinity (but, let us add, not rough, male but masculinity full of charm and sex appeal) then Moryc Welt is its simple reverse. Konrad Eberhardt<sup>57</sup> in the above recalled quotation characterises Moryc with terms typically associated with femininity. *Charm, warmth and gentleness* are not among features typically associated with masculinity. What is interesting, these

female attributes are assessed positively by the critic: they make the motive of male friendship more beautiful. Moryc is a sexual misfit. He was attributed with the features stereotypically assigned to homosexuals: effeminacy and talkativeness, excessive gesticulation and affective way of being, refined elegance and “dandyish” style. This portrait is supplemented also by his aversion towards women and all-embracing love for Karol. If Borowiecki personifies the ideal corporeality, Moryc’s effeminate body reveals itself as the non-normative body. In the initial scene when the protagonist gets off a tandem on which he came to the manor of Borowieccy together with Karol (which, of course, is not insignificant) he runs towards the manor in the funnily exalted, soft, effeminate way. Moryc’s corporeality undermines the fundamental for our culture binary opposition of male-female. *However it is not that* – according to Tomasz Basiuk – *the effeminacy is identical to any specific sexual diversity but that sexual diversity, as we understand it today, developed in relation to the effeminacy. It is so because both categories partly overlap and sexual diversity became recognisable in the form of effeminacy or in relation to it*<sup>58</sup>. Hence the effeminacy always denotes sexual diversity, transgression of sexual standards, subversiveness of sexes, inability to fit dominating models of masculinity. In Moryc this effeminacy is additionally intensified by refined clothes that he wears. He is identified by huge bow ties (white, with colour dots, checked, etc.) and rings that decorate almost all of his fingers. Karol in a friendly way parodies this predilection for aestheticism, splendour and excess which is expressed not only in his clothes, by saying that *Welt likes the ceremonies, colours, fragrances, bells and singing*. These attributes differentiate him from his friends: both from the male, haughty and phallic Karol, and ascetic and sentimental Maks.

But the effeminacy here does not mean that Moryc is devoid of self-confidence, decisiveness or strong character. There is in *The Promised Land* a great scene in which the protagonist unexpectedly turns into a gangster<sup>59</sup>. This is the scene when he comes to Grünspan in order to tell him that he has no intention to give back the borrowed money (yes, Moryc cheats but not for his own benefit – as in Reymont’s novel – but to save joint business<sup>60</sup>). When the former calls the police Moryc with unknown decisiveness and even rapacity makes him realise that there is no proof confirming the credit. So he impersonates the role of a swindler and liar. What is important, this scene is preceded by the image of Moryc standing in front of a mirror: black coat with turned up collar and black hat with a wide brim falling down on his forehead which refer us to the American gangster cinema, they are to make him more confident in the strange to him overwhelming masculinity. There is no trace of the old Moryc: in conversation with Grünspan the previously intrinsic smile does not appear even for a moment on the man’s face. In his old bows, bow ties and rings he would be too weak to commit this punishable deception. Putting on the gangster’s mask, arming himself with male attributes he becomes a merciless criminal. Surprising is the point of this sequence: Welt leaves the banker’s, sheds the gangster’s stylisation and sits down on a bench. The camera shows him now in a close-up thanks to which we see drops of sweat on his forehead. Suddenly Moryc-Pszoniak looks right into the camera, smiles and waves to us, spectators. This scene, on the one hand confirms that this male face was merely a stylisation and costume, while on the other it proves that this very male costume was a burden to him. Why did the director decide to show the backstage of the performance in this

scene? To let us know that the existence of Moryc, as well as the existence of cinema in general, is based on pretence and appearance? That this is the figure that is the key to the entire story? Or maybe that namely Moryc, and not for example Karol, is the director's messenger? It is worth adding that Wojciech Pszoniak who worked with Wajda before in *Demons* presented in the Krakow Old Theatre but also in *Pilatus and others* and *The Wedding* (1972) was at the time the director's favourite actor<sup>61</sup>.

Wojciech Pszoniak<sup>62</sup> claimed that the character of Moryc owes a lot to Parolles, the protagonist of *All's Well That Ends Well* by Shakespeare, whom he impersonated in 1971 when Konrad Swinarski staged this play in the Old Theatre. It seems, however, that not only to him. Two years before *The Promised Land* he played a figure of a homosexual in disguise, engineer Andrzej, in unjustly forgotten film by Jerzy Gruza entitled *Przeprowadzka* (*Moving*) which came to light ten years later. The film was banned from distribution in the 70s most probably due to its depiction of the results of the propaganda of success and showing in a distorted mirror the ideology of *dynamic development*. *The Promised Land* and *Moving* touch upon the same problem: the problem of consumerism of the Gierek era, with the difference that Gruza's film makes it openly and Wajda with the use of a historical costume. *Moving* – just as *The Promised Land* – is a model example of a buddy film<sup>63</sup> in which we find motives brought directly from the cinema of dissent<sup>64</sup>. What is important for us, however, Pszoniak created Moryc's character from the same gestures that he used to create the character of Andrzej, man on the brink of a nervous breakdown. To the critic of "Film" the actor seemed in this role *a mouse that roared*<sup>65</sup>. Pszoniak's acting – both in *Moving* and in *The Promised Land* – is streaked with hysteria. Borowiecki's corporeality is monolithic and harmonious, while Welt's corporeality (and Andrzej's) is – disintegrated and inconsistent. Pszoniak's acting is full of brisk gestures, faces and acrobatics, bends and jumps. Every part of his body seems to be active. It is a body that is unstable, clownish, vibrating, affective and feverish. Olbrychski's Karol was homogenous, stable and ideal, Moryc (and Andrzej) on the contrary: is changeable, sensitive and picky. He goes smoothly from a wide smile to despair, from joy to crying. This streaked with hysteria Pszoniak's acting in *Moving* is justified by the plot; it is also justified in *The Promised Land* but not in such a direct way.

Hysterical body is a body that talks. What nonverbal message does it transmit in *Moving*? Gruza's film opens with a shot of a tower block housing estate creating a closed, claustrophobic space. A removal van parks in front of one of the blocks. Andrzej, a young engineer who moved in with his wife into a new three-room flat, wants to move out of it. Without his wife, however. *Do you feel ok?* – the truck driver, Staszek (Olgiard Łukaszewicz) asks him, since the man has got only one suitcase with him. The journey that he sets off to will be more symbolic than a real one: he sets off as if he was standing still; he abandons his past but keeps coming back. The aim of the journey is not the journey itself but as Andrzej admits himself – fear. What is he afraid of? What is he running from? Striking with intensity is especially one of the retrospective scenes, the scene of male hysteria: Andrzej in one hand holds a bucket with orange-pink paint, dips his finger in it and before his wife's eyes touches a white wall in the room. Then he uncovers the woman's breasts and strokes with the finger dripping paint one of the nipples and then proceeds to

cover the entire flat in paint: books, TV, record player, curtains, carpets, etc. This scene, on the one hand, shows what Andrzej hates most (little stabilisation, woman, objects) and on the other it is a kind of liberation, an act of rebellion against consumerist monotony, hysterical scream of dissent to live somebody else's life. Andrzej during the journey – non-journey is confronted with his family: first with his father and brother, Antoni (Antoni Pszoniak), then wife (Krystyna Stankiewicz). Antoni tries to bring him back onto the right path: *What does your worker's council say about that?* – he asks and then launches into a tirade about the happy life in a socialist country. Others do not understand Andrzej's lack of acceptance of the world as it is: his brother or limited neighbours see the source of all maladies in his long hair. The conversation with Andrzej's brother was confronted with the images of people jumping with parachutes: *I feel that I am falling. As if my parachute did not open in the air. But I am not falling meekly: I shout, talk, make fun, make faces and this irritates them. I should hit the ground silently, without a shout, in order not to spoil their certainty that green is green, white is white and black is black.* The protagonist does not fit the vision of an individual programmed by the authorities: he rebels because he does not agree to standardisation, he shouts and stamps because he is suffocating in the hypocritical world without doubt, without authenticity, he breaks the silence because he does not agree to the reality in which you cannot be yourself.

The second meeting, with his wife this time, when she appears in the removal van already as the non-wife, sheds a bit more light on what is bothering Andrzej so much in life. We get to know the wife first in retrospectives in which she appears as the reincarnation of the protagonist of *Hunting Flies* – a castrating mantis. Moving a cherry across her thigh in a welcoming gesture she explains to Andrzej the *law of human condition (you cannot waste your individuality)*, in curl-papers she wisely explains what co-existence of *two so different and so complicated creatures as man and woman* is about, then she takes off her tights in an erotic gesture and sermonises that *sadism and masochism are inseparable elements of every, even the most normal love, they constitute two poles of the fight – to possess and be possessed by the other.* In those tirades, as in distorted mirror, Andrzej's life looks at itself. Mentally damaged, repressed, devoured and degraded. His wife is aware of her sexuality which, however, does not work on Andrzej at all. For him she is repulsive, something that he is afraid of. When the wife appears in the van, the protagonist encourages Staszek to seduce her, which he does. However he is punished for it: Andrzej crushes his hand with the wheels of the van and meekly comes back home. Was he jealous of his wife? Jealous – yes, not of his wife, however, but of Staszek. They are connected with a clear, even though unspoken, intimate bond. Staszek feeds Andrzej with pears from a jar; when the engineer is late he shouts at him and slaps him; finally Andrzej lustfully looks at the driver (as in the scene when he is seduced by the wife of the engineer with whose eyes we are looking at the eroticised, uncovered torso of the driver). In the last sequence of the film the protagonist comes back to his wife and their life in the claustrophobic flat. It seems that he has accepted his place in the (socialist) world. These are only the appearances, however. After Staszek and his helpers take Andrzej's luggage up, the camera and we – the spectators – follow it. We look at the removal van from which to the concrete pavement flows... a trickle of blood. Then we see from the window of An-

drzej's flat the van going away with dead Andrzej on top of it. The man once again runs away from the stabilisation and the woman (and maybe: the stabilisation that the woman brings?) towards the male homosocial group.

Life with a woman was presented in *Moving* as oppressive, while male group meant freedom. Also sexual one. In one of the first sequences of the film we see a man painting his nails red. On another occasion the same worker (Wiesław Dymny) demonstrates to his colleague (Antoni Konarek) what orgasm is about. Hence it is not surprising that Andrzej feels at ease in the male space (the space of the van) and he manages honesty.

Staszek: *Andrzej would like to be somebody else.*

Wife: *Who?*

Andrzej: *A woman.*

The sexual diversity reveals itself in *Moving* in the same way as in *The Promised Land*: in effeminacy, in aversion and contempt for women, in longing for being among other men. Hence the way Andrzej commits suicide is symbolic, jumping from the balcony of a flat, being the hated space of a woman onto a truck symbolising a male adventure and community. It is precisely the heteronormative fiction, obligatory heterosexuality that causes the protagonist's hysteria and in the end leads to his self-destruction. This rebellion is – as Krystyna Kłosińska wrote about the rebellion of a hysterical woman – a dagger stuck in one's own body<sup>66</sup>. The already quoted critic of "Film" who in the beginning of his review of *Moving* admitted that this was not a good film, noticed that Pszoniak acted in the upper registers but his shouts and pathos have less to do with a rebellion of a noble romantic against the rotten mundaneness of the world and more with the clinical symptoms of a violently developing schizophrenia. And this is not what it is about<sup>67</sup>. On the contrary, in my opinion *Moving* is precisely about that. Paweł Leszkowicz and Tomek Kitliński, analysing works of Freud on male hysteria according to which hysterical neurosis is caused by human internal bisexuality, notice that hysteria is the reaction to the multiplicity of sexualities. Homosexuality causes a spasm entering as an impulse the interior of heteronormative society and so revealing its subconscious multiple sexuality that is subject to suppression<sup>68</sup>. The conflict between the desire to express one's own individuality and sexuality and the social repression of this desire leads to hysterical symptoms. Even though this diagnosis is closer to the characteristics of women's than men's hysteria which was quickly desexualised and connected with trauma (e.g. war) I still think that it renders well the status of the characters played by Pszoniak.

Hysterical symptoms occur here as a result of suppression, denial of desire which has to remain hidden and may not be expressed. Suppressed desire incoherently looks for the way of being expressed in hysterical body language. For the hysterical body speaks. Moryc's body is the most unstable and restless when the opportunity to get closer to Karol appears. As in the scene in which Borowiecki deciphers for Moryc the telegram about the increase of custom duty or when the protagonists mark in birchen forest the place for the new factory. Unblocked and released Welt's body simply dances around Borowiecki. Moryc kisses his friend, jumps at him. He is happy but still controls the awakened desire in order not to reveal it. We are dealing here with a *bodily adjustment*: desire at the same time aroused and repressed is looking for an outlet in hysterical symptoms. However,

Moryc's behaviour is merely streaked with hysteria while Andrzej's rebellion assumed a clearly hysterical form. Moryc is a member of the male homosocial group where he finds male support (e.g. quasi-fatherly kisses) hence the gap between his desire and reality is not as intense as in the case of Andrzej who was locked in a claustrophobic cage with his castrating wife, leading to a horrible struggle, hysterical spasms and dramatic fight for fulfilment of his homosocial desire. Pszoniak's protagonists yearn for the company of other men. But only in the case of Moryc this longing – at least to a certain extent – is satisfied. His divided identity is united by the very presence of his companions. Welt is not locked in a cage with a woman, he is not rejected by his male friends: his otherness (doubled: ethnical and sexual) is accepted by his friends. *Somebody who is afraid of exclusion... – Wojciech Pszoniak said about his creation of Parolles – afraid of being named, of the disgraceful stigmatisation that he is only a theatre hack, joker, gay, Jew, one who can be easily mocked and harmed scot-free... This helped me later in "The Promised Land" with the role of Moryc Welt*<sup>69</sup>. Pszoniak astutely notices that what Moryc – the double other: as a Jew and a homosexual – is afraid of most is stigmatisation, exclusion and rejection. It is significant that it was the actor that came up with the idea that the protagonist should carry Karol's photo with him. The photo falls out of his pocket in one scene. Maks picks it up and surprised informs Karol about the finding. When Moryc quickly takes the photo away the smile disappears from his face as if he was afraid of being unmasked. But Borowiecki in no way – verbal or non-verbal – comments on the friend's lost item. Are his feelings towards him obvious for him? In this love, as it seems, he sees nothing worth contempt. Borowiecki is a narcissist who wants to be loved. He wants to see himself in the looks of thrilled women and men. What is more, Moryc's love is for him more important than Anka's that he cheats on and abandons, while remaining loyal towards his friend to the end. Hence how is it possible that love of another man does not arouse Karol's fear? Let us look at the genesis of the idea of "homosexuality" that will allow us, in my opinion, to understand Borowiecki's openness.

As proven by Michel Foucault in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* at the end of the 19th century a specific category of a homosexual was created, understood as a new type of personality, the category which by becoming a part of criminological and medical discourse, enabled including "sinful sodomites" in social supervision<sup>70</sup>. From now on the homosexual, who was seen as a sick, perverted and immoral individual, could not only be characterised and described but also recognised in the society. According to queer researchers the homosexual identity – or more broadly: identity of a sexual misfit – crystallised in the face of the loud trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895. *Wilde – Tomasz Basiuk writes referring to Moe Meyer – chose martyrdom leading to the equation of the adopted by him pose of a dandy and identity of a homosexual which until then was devoid of a clear mark and as such remained absent in culture and thus inaccessible as an option of social existence*<sup>71</sup>. Wilde's body worked as a screen on which the name "homosexual" was written<sup>72</sup>. The author of *The portrait of Dorian Gray* whose aestheticism and dandy's pose were aimed against the Victorian masculinity became almost the synonym of homosexuality of the era. His *emblematic trial* made from his pose a clear mark of homosexuals who became recognisable precisely in the form of effeminacy. So if from Wilde's famous trial of 1895 dates the recognisable by Western



*The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)

society<sup>73</sup> modern male homosexuality then not surprisingly in Wajda's film taking place ten years before that (we are informed about it by Stein – Jerzy Zelnik who informs Grunspan that day before Wiktor Hugo died) Moryc's otherness is not named even though it is expressed in many ways (effeminacy, fear of female Eros, love for Karol). The protagonists do not stigmatise Moryc because in his behaviour, they do not see anything disturbing (he does not satisfy his sexual desire and at the time solely the sexual acts were stigmatised – and punished).

Significant in this context seems the remark by Michel Foucault<sup>74</sup> for whom the emergence of the modern idea of "homosexuality" led to the emergence of suspicion with which male friendship was treated since then. Homophobia – according to Elizabeth Badinter – turns men into *martyrs of masculinity but also destroys male friendship. Since Freud we have known that male friendship is the sublimation of homosexual desire and that on the other hand men are very reserved in showing their attachment. For that reason many avoid mutual intimacy.* Men in order not to be accused of male-male *desire subconsciously make closer mutual contact more difficult*<sup>75</sup>. In *The Promised Land* dated before the appearance of the modern category of "homosexuality" nothing like this takes place. Karol, Maks and Moryc do not avoid mutual intimacy and do not make closer mutual contact more difficult. On the contrary: precisely due to Moryc's otherness the German and the Pole treat him differently than each other. How do they explain to themselves this tenderness, the caring kisses and consoling of a crying thirty-year-old man? Does the fact that the friendship or in fact love between them was not contaminated by anti-homosexual fear, homophobic paranoia prove that namely the emergence of the idea of "homosexuality" (and thus: homophobia) destroyed male friendship?<sup>76</sup> Thus modern masculinity would appear as masculinity marked with lack, masculinity constantly looking for its completeness beyond the regime of binary divisions.

*The Promised Land* was made, however, almost 80 years after the scandal and trial of Wilde. In the West the gay liberation movement fought increasingly openly for its rights at the time. In cinema gay motives appeared with an increasing frequency and were presented in a bolder way, just to mention the Oscar success of *Cabaret* (1972) by Bob Fosse, but also films by Visconti, Pasolini or Bertolucci as well as American buddy films clearly streaked with homoeroticism. Wajda challenges (the question is: to what extent consciously?) the phallic masculinity, stable and unanimous because he boldly erases the border between hetero- and homosexuality. He presents sexual identities which know no boundaries. Nothing in the relation between Karol, Maks and Moryc is obvious, everything seems problematic and ambivalent. In American buddy films the figure of a homosexual was used to differentiate the male relations from the negatively valued homosexual desire (*Papillon*, *Scarecrow*), while Wajda makes this figure, devoid of the negative polish, one of the three key figures creating male relationship. This, of course, has its consequences. Even though *The Promised Land* seems a model example of a buddy film, by attributing homosexual identity to Moryc, the director makes this convention explode from the inside. Male-male love is here more dangerous and risky which makes Wajda's film braver than his exegetes thought till today. Without putting the dot over the "i" the director on the one hand suggests to the international audience that he is an open artist, moving with the times (hence not only homosexuality but also bold at the time erotic scenes including *fellatio* in the scene in the carriage)

while in Poland where homosexuality was still a complete taboo, Moryc's heterosexuality did not have to give rise to any doubt. Robin Wood claims that over homoeroticisation of the relation between men in buddy films surely would cause panic among the male audience. Moryc Welt, however, not only did not cause such a panic in Poland <sup>77</sup> but even was the most liked, also by men, figure of the film. Moryc's homosexuality was not, as it seems, recognised by the Polish spectators despite unambiguous signals. The said label is not uttered on screen so there is no need to fear. And even if Welt's otherness was noticed, the film's perception at the time did not reflect it. Of course, we sense that some critics (like Eberhardt) are aware of the erotic tension between Moryc and Karol but they do not say it directly. As if naming it could defile this friendship, stigmatise it with sin, as suggested by Maciej Karpiński in the published in 1976 monograph about *Pszoniak*: *it is also worth noticing with what subtlety and discretion Pszoniak merely marked the inappropriate element of his inclination towards Borowiecki which might be something more than friendship. Just as in the entire role he managed to avoid generic aspects, also here he managed to avoid completely even the slightest triviality* <sup>78</sup>. Karpiński does not want to call the inclination towards Borowiecki by its name. Even contemporary researchers rarely do: Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska <sup>79</sup> writes about the *three brothers from Łódź* (Moryc is Borowiecki's factotum) and Piotr Skrzypczak <sup>80</sup> notices that this *a bit ambiguous* liking makes Welt Karol's *younger brother* (what this ambiguity would be about we do not learn, however) <sup>81</sup>.

It is difficult to guess whether the transformation of Reymont's Moryc from a heterosexual traitor into a loyal homosexual was Wajda's or *Pszoniak*'s idea (if Moryc was played by Jerzy Zelnik who was initially selected by the director for this role, Welt probably would not be homosexual). It is certain, however, that this time Andrzej Wajda did not refrain from it <sup>82</sup>. Welt's otherness was not named but it was presented. For Wajda cinema has always been the art of image and with the use of the images (and not words) he expressed what was really important <sup>83</sup>. This is how he structured the political message that would be clear only to the insiders and this is how he created his own language of desire. The language that does without words. This idealised male love (not so much asexual as it would initially seem) is a kind of a dream about the male idyll. Without the existence of homophobia but also recognisable homosexuality (desire is not stigmatised but also may not be consumed). What remains is the light of incredible male love – the love beyond borders of psychosexual orientation (but also beyond ethnic and national borders). The splendour of male-male desire beyond binary divisions, the desire which is ambiguous, unlimited and contradictory. There is something not only utopian but maybe even rebelliously queer in this eradication of borders.

### Nation and sexuality

*The Promised Land* in the West, especially in the USA, was accused of anti-Semitism. In Poland on the other hand it was considered an anti-Polish film and it was concluded that the most spiteful figure of the film was the Pole, Karol Borowiecki. Was it justified? Wajda, when reconstructing industrial Łódź at the end of the 19th century took care, as it seems, to show in equally negative light the greedy, rapacious and two-faced Poles, Germans and Jews. The famous scene of



*The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)

the morning prayer which is said first by the Pole Wilczek (Wojciech Siemion) then by the German Bucholc and the Jew Grünspan and the object of which is in fact the golden calf suggests equality between the collective characters of the film (in the novel only the Jew prayed to the golden god). In Wajda's work the national and ethnic representation of the 19th century Łódź does not seem very biased. Among the Poles there are on the one hand noble Trawiński (Andrzej Łapicki) who commits suicide because he cannot lie and cheat and on the other – greedy usurer Stach Wilczek merciless towards the poor of Łódź<sup>84</sup>. The Jews on the other hand are represented by the clever Grünspan who does not give credit to Borowiecki in order not to have competition or vengeful Zucker (Jerzy Nowak), but also the sensitive, well read and handsome Stein or charming Halpern (Włodzimierz Boruński) who is fascinated by Łódź. Also the images of Germans are diversified: sadistic and cruel Herman Bucholc is confronted with the idealistic Horn (Piotr Fronczewski), and the image of demonic erotomaniac Kessler is confronted with the portrait of the old, good-natured Baum (Kazimierz Opaliński). So it seems that Wajda distinguishes neither Poles, nor Germans or Jews. On the contrary: he weakens the Polocentrism and anti-Semitism of Reymont who wrote *The Promised Land* on commission from the National Democratic Party. Konrad Eberhardt goes even further claiming that the male “triangle” presented in the film is opposed to national stereotypes: *German, Maks (...) is carefree and full of imagination like a Pole; Karol Borowiecki, depicted clearly by Daniel Olbrychski with his walk, systematic nature and decisiveness resembles more a German; Moryc Welt is in fact clearly a Jew but also a Jew a bit distanced from his community*<sup>85</sup>.

The problem of the national and ethnic representations seems more problematic when we confront them with representations dealing with sexuality. Ewa Mazierska wrote about it in her text on the structure of *different sexualities* in Polish cinema under communism: *Through the narrative, the mise-en-scène and casting (Karol is*

played by Daniel Olbrychski who was the sex symbol of the 1970s) Wajda constructs a sexual hierarchy of his male characters and, by extension, of the nations to which they belong. Thus, Karol is at the top of the hierarchy, having a Polish fiancée who is utterly devoted to him, a Jewish lover and eventually a rich German wife. Below him is Maks who lusts after Karol's Polish fiancée, but fails to seduce her. At the very bottom is Jewish Moryc, who is unhappily in love with Karol (...). Thus, Wajda uses sexual stereotypes to elevate Poles over other nationalities and ethnicities<sup>86</sup>. Heterosexual Pole is on top of the sexual hierarchy of characters due to his unlimited potency, while homosexual Moryc is on its bottom because he has no intention to make use of his fertility. Also Elżbieta Ostrowska dedicated her deliberations to the construction of the images of sexes in the context of national ideology in *The Promised Land*. She focussed on the analysis of female characters: Anka, Lucy and Mada who in Wajda's work were clearly contrasted with each other. *All three characters seem ideal because they are even too unambiguous portraits of the so-called national characters (...) with systems of values stereotypically attributed to them. (...) Subsequent relations of Borowiecki and Anka, Lucy and Mada metaphorically mark the subsequent stages of the process of moral degradation of the protagonist which stems from the rejection of values inscribed in the traditional ethos of Polish nobility*<sup>87</sup>. Especially the figures of Anka and Lucy were created based on binary oppositions. The Pole and the Jew are opposed to each other through the scope and nature of their sexuality<sup>88</sup>. Anka is the personification of sexual innocence and "purity", while Lucy symbolises sexual expansion and possessiveness. National discourse in *The Promised Land* was structured based on the universal narrative regarding the nation in which "our women" are "pure" and the strangers lascivious and bad. According to Ostrowska the representation of Jewish women is characterised here by the *excess of sexuality* thus leading to their reduction to the role of sexual objects (Lucy Zucker<sup>89</sup>) while the representation of Jewish men – by its insufficiency (Zucker is an impotent and homosexuality makes Moryc a faulty man because his sexuality does not support reproduction). The representation of Poles is different: Polish women are characterised by reduction of sexuality solely to procreative functions while Polish men are characterised by sexual power and potency (it is the Pole Borowiecki who gives Lucy a child that Zucker was unable to). The Polishness constitutes itself in opposition to the figure of the Other who in the Polish national discourse is, according to Ostrowska, the figure of a Jew. To sum up, the cultural consequence of losing national independence proved to be in Poland the demasculinisation of men, their symbolic castration, so the phallic masculinity of Borowiecki, that the other friends lack, fulfils in the first place a compensatory role.

The sexual hierarchy of characters on top of which – according to Ewa Mazierska and Elżbieta Ostrowska – is the heterosexual Pole and on the bottom the homosexual Jew is disturbed by other elements of the work (e.g. acting) that destroy the explicitness of this hierarchy. Welt, even though he is equipped with features stereotypically attributed to homosexuals – thanks to Pszoniak's creation – is not, in my opinion a stereotypical character. His non-normativity is not qualified negatively. He is accepted by his friends not because he has abandoned his specifically homosexual sensitivity, that is adjusted to heterosexual standard – as suggested by Ewa Mazierska<sup>90</sup> – but it was the heterosexual friends who opened to his sexual otherness which, however, they could not define. It is the loyal, spectacular Jew in love, and not the beau-

tiful Pole who appeared to be the character who aroused among the spectators of *The Promised Land* the greatest liking. Karol due to his incredible beauty is, surely, a compensatory figure (Poland and Poles are as beautiful as the Pole presented in the film) but he is also the character judged negatively: he is beautiful but also amoral, seductive and evil. Surely he is not the virtuous son of Poland. Of course, this amorality is also fascinating (and seductive) but it comes from beyond the national discourse eulogising, as Gombrowicz would have it, solely the virtuous national beauty. Thus at the source of *The Promised Land* is the nationalistic narrative which, however, is disarmed by the director and its xenophobic blade is blunted.

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One of the main protagonists of Andrzej Wajda's work is the male homosocial desire, desire particularly dangerous for male national communities. It was noticed by Christopher Caes in the already quoted text in which the author, by referring to psychoanalytical categories, presented the sources of the specific structure of male subjectivity in the work of the director of *Canal*. According to the American Slavic expert this cinema being *the cinema of male relations streaked with erotism*<sup>91</sup> *constitutes a challenge*<sup>92</sup> for simple binary oppositions: homosocial-homosexual. Even though the structure of male communities in his films (e.g. in *Speed*) and the structure of nationalist relations of men (e.g. *Männerbund*) are streaked with the same erotic desire, in the end they assume in fact different forms. In Wajda's work the male homosocial desire is not, as in the case of nationalistic narratives, a force threatening the protagonists of these films: the director constructs the "ideal of masculinity" in order to later destroy it and in this destruction eroticise the destroyed ideal<sup>93</sup>. *The Promised Land* magnificently illustrates this challenge posed to the dichotomy of homosocial and homosexual. Not even because we are also dealing here with disintegration and degradation of masculinity full of dignity, omnipotent and unmoved but because among the homosocial group the director places the figure of a misfit. Inscription of a homosexual (or more broadly: sexual otherness) within the male community and – what is even worse – his acceptance does not fit within the frames of national/nationalistic discourse in which gay is always the enemy of the nation (case of Gombrowicz's Gonzal). The functioning of nationalistic male formations is based on simultaneous stimulation and support of male-male eroticism leading to categorical separation of the "healthy" homosocial relations from the "defiled" homosexual relations. The companions in love with themselves could reach the conclusion that their need to be with another man structurally was not different from the desire that homosexuals feel for each other. This fear makes them exclude gays from the national space and leads them to homophobia which, however, never appears in Wajda's cinema. Thus the ideal body of the Pole is confronted in *The Promised Land* with the anti-body of the homosexual Jew, but relations between them are not shaped according to the characteristic for national narrations anti-homosexual scenario.

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- <sup>1</sup> Despite the nomination for an Oscar American distributors did not decide to present the film in cinemas in New York or Los Angeles (see J. Falkowska, *Głosy z zewnątrz. Recepcja filmów Andrzeja Wajdy w krajach anglojęzycznych*, in: *Filmowy świat Andrzeja Wajdy*, ed. E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska, P. Sitariski, Universitas, Kraków 2003, p. 359-375).
- <sup>2</sup> *Zapisy cenzury*, in: *Wajda mówi o sobie: wywiady i teksty*, ed. W. Wertenstein, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2000, p. 90.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>7</sup> T. Lubelski, *Dwie ziemie jałowe: 1898 i 1974*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1997, No. 18, p. 118-119.
- <sup>8</sup> B. Michalak, *Polskie Oscary*, Prószyński i Ska, Warszawa 2000, p. 215.
- <sup>9</sup> C. James, *Land of Promise*, "The New York Times Film Reviews", 5 II 1988. Quoted after: J. Falkowska, *Andrzej Wajda: History, Politics and Nostalgia in Polish Cinema*, Berghahn Books, New York-Oxford 2007, p. 151.
- <sup>10</sup> *Wajda has demonstrated exceptional lack of tact* – wrote Bartosz Żurawiecki – *not only had he censored one of the best fragments in his work but clearly he had not noticed that the actress became after her death a cult figure (Na falach pruderii*, "Dialog" 2009, No. 3, p. 108). It is possible that castrating his work of one of the best scenes Wajda was not concerned with Anti-Semitism but with sex – all the sexually bold scenes were eliminated from the film (the director cut not only the scene with Jędrusik but also the orgy in Kesler's gardens, including the frame in which Moryc slaps and pushes away a naked woman as well as the scene of sex between Maks and a woman met by chance).
- <sup>11</sup> It seems that Claude Lanzmann thundered the most: *In this film Jews from Łódź are presented as caricatures in "Sturmer", anti-Jewish magazine of Julius Streicher, the most spiteful of criminals* (quote after: *Wajda: Filmy*, ed. J. Płażewski, v. 2, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1996, p. 245.).
- <sup>12</sup> J. L. Douin, „*Le Monde*”: „*Katyni*” – *przejmujący i bolesny film dla Wajdy*, trans. J. Kawa, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 14.04.2009; see polemic of A. Michnik, *Narodowość pluszowego misia*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 14.04.2009.
- <sup>13</sup> T. Lubelski, *Wajda*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 2006, p. 151.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.
- <sup>16</sup> *I have always wanted to make such "American" film*, admitted the director (A. Wajda, *Kino i reszta świata*, Znak, Kraków 2000, p. 162.).
- <sup>17</sup> T. Lubelski, *Wajda*, op. cit., p. 151.
- <sup>18</sup> R. Wood, *From Buddies to Lovers*, in: Idem: *Hollywood: From Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond*, Expanded and Revised Edition, Columbia University Press, New York 2003, p. 203.
- <sup>19</sup> M. Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, ed. II, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1987, p. 23.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Kornatowska, *Eros i film*, Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, Łódź 1986, p. 98.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 105.
- <sup>23</sup> R. Dyer, *The Master of Images: Essays on Representation*, Routledge, New York 1993.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.
- <sup>25</sup> R. Wood, op. cit., p. 204.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 205.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.
- <sup>28</sup> M. Simpson, *Don't Die on My Buddy: Homosexuality and Masochism in War Movies*, in: *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity*, Routledge, New York 1994, p. 228.
- <sup>29</sup> R. Wood, op. cit., p. 203-204.
- <sup>30</sup> The term of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: idem, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Columbia University Press, New York 1985.
- <sup>31</sup> D. Olbrychski, *Anioły wokół głowy*, BGW, Warszawa 1992.
- <sup>32</sup> W. Pszoniak, *Aktor*, conversation with M. Komar, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2009, p. 126.
- <sup>33</sup> K. Eberhardt, *Świat bez grzechu*, in: Idem, *O polskich filmach*, selection and introduction: R. Koniczek, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1982, p. 376-377 (first published in "Kino" 1974, No. 12, pp. 10-15).
- <sup>34</sup> It is worth adding that Andrzej Wajda explores two characteristic themes for national narrative to which Polish directors come back very often: a Polish girl (Anka) as a proud object of desire of a stranger (Maks) and a converted to Polishness strange woman (engrossed in Polish literature Mada Müller) in love with the beautiful Polish man (Borowiecki). The first theme was analysed by E. Ostrowska-Chmura (*Polka – dumny przedmiot pożądania*, in: *Ciało i seksualność w kinie polskim*, ed. S. Jagielski, A. Morstin-Popławska, WUJ, Kraków 2009, pp. 139-153); the second was the object of my interest in a different text (*(Melo)dramaty polskości. Naród i pleć w pol-*

- skim filmie patriotycznym, in: *Kino polskie jako kino narodowe*, ed. T. Lubelski, M. Stroński, Ha!Art, Kraków 2009, pp. 57-83.
- <sup>35</sup> P. Lis, *Liryyczny bohater w dramatycznych okolicznościach. O twórczości Andrzeja Wajdy*, in: *W kręgu filmu polskiego XXXV-lecia*, ed. J. Trzynałowski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1981, p. 154-155.
- <sup>36</sup> See. J. Pyszny, *Kobieta w filmach szkoły polskiej*, in: *Polska szkoła filmowa. Poetyka i tradycja*, ed. J. Trzynałowski, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław 1976.
- <sup>37</sup> This mechanism was characterised by Christopher Caes, analysing *Speed: when women appear in the film or when somebody talks about them, they perform a specific function, namely their presence or just a mention about them arouses male desire but then they disappear quickly or their absence is strongly underlined, depriving the desire, already aroused, of its traditional object (Widowiska katastroficzne: trauma historyczna i męska podmiotowość we wczesnych filmach Andrzeja Wajdy*, trans. Ch. Caes, Z. Batko, in: *Filmowy świat Andrzeja Wajdy*, ed. E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska, P. Sitarski, Universitas, Kraków 2003, p. 149). In Wajda's work this mechanism may be seen not only in *Speed*, but also in other films, including *The Promised Land*.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 174.
- <sup>39</sup> *For Wajda's generation (...) war – traumatic death of his father and motherland took place (...) at the moment of maturing sexuality thus disrupting the progress of the oedipal complex towards its solution*. Ibidem, p. 174.
- <sup>40</sup> E. Ostrowska, *Niebezpieczne związki. Dyskurs miłosny, erotyczny i narodowy w filmach Andrzeja Wajdy*, in: *Filmowy świat...* op. cit., p. 210.
- <sup>41</sup> E. Nurczyńska-Fidelska, *Polska klasyka literacka wobec Andrzeja Wajdy*, Śląsk, Katowice 1998, p. 156.
- <sup>42</sup> It is not surprising then that Andrzej Wajda called the man full of life energy a lyrical capitalist (A. Wajda, *O polityce, o sztuce, o sobie*, introduction, selection and editing M. Malatyńska, Prószyński i s-ka, Warszawa 2000, p. 194).
- <sup>43</sup> W. Pszoniak, op. cit., p. 126.
- <sup>44</sup> Tadeusz Lubelski noticed that all three – after breaking off contacts with their families – are in search of a new ethical model. It should combine effectiveness of action with a certain ideal image of oneself that none of them is able to abandon completely. Maybe for that reason – doing many mean things in the course – they are least salvage their friendship (T. Lubelski, *Dwie ziemie...*, op. cit., 126.).
- <sup>45</sup> H. White, *Bodies and Their Plots*, in: *Choreographing History*, ed. S. L. Foster, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1995, p. 232.
- <sup>46</sup> T. Lubelski, *Daniel Olbrychski: Aktor Wajdy*, in: *Być jak Cybulski?* ed. I. Cegielińska, Fundacja Kino, Warszawa 2008, p. 13.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 13-14.
- <sup>48</sup> D. Olbrychski, op. cit., 210.
- <sup>49</sup> L. Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, in: *Feminist Film Theory. A Reader*, ed. S. Thornham, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1999, p. 63.
- <sup>50</sup> J. Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1982, s. 47, quoted in S. Neale, *Masculinity as spectacle. Reflections on men and mainstream cinema*, in: *Screening the Male. Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, eds. S. Cohan, I. Rae Hark, Routledge, London-New York 1993, p. 17.
- <sup>51</sup> See Ch. Caes, op. cit., p. 152, 157.
- <sup>52</sup> D. Olbrychski, op. cit., p. 212.
- <sup>53</sup> S. Neale, op. cit., p. 18.
- <sup>54</sup> L. Mulvey, op. cit., p. 65.
- <sup>55</sup> A. Ledóchowski, *Złoty cielec*, in: idem, *Ulotne obrazy*, Polska Federacja DKF, Warszawa 1998, p. 60 (first published: "Film" 1975, No. 8, p. 6-7).
- <sup>56</sup> P. Skrzypczak, *Filmowe panoramy społeczeństwa polskiego XIX wieku*, Wyd. Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2004, p. 139.
- <sup>57</sup> K. Eberhardt, op. cit.
- <sup>58</sup> T. Basiuk, *Casus Wilde'a: homoseksualizm i tożsamość odmienca od końca XIX wieku*, in: *Inny, Inna, Inne. O Inności w kulturze*, ed. M. Janion, C. Snochowska-Gonzales, K. Szczuka, Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, Warszawa 2004, p. 324.
- <sup>59</sup> According to Ewelina Nurczyńska-Fidelska (op. cit., pp. 118-126) the entire film was based on the convention of a romantic thriller with elements of gangster cinema. The author recognises in the film archetypal protagonists of this narration: a gangster and his gang (Karol, Moryc, Maks), usurer (Wilczek), assassin (Bum-Bum), femme fatale (Lucy Zucker) and lyrical beauty (Anka).
- <sup>60</sup> It is worth adding that in the novel this conversation ends in agreement with Grünspan and thus betrayal of Borowiecki.
- <sup>61</sup> See T. Lubelski, *Wajda*, op. cit., p. 151. The cinema historian noticed also, referring to the director's memories, that when working on *Demons* when Wajda for the first time worked with Pszoniak, the actor proved to be a real support for him (ibidem, p. 128).

- <sup>62</sup> W. Pszoniak, op. cit.
- <sup>63</sup> In Gruba's film we are dealing with all six categories that structure buddy narration – from journey to death.
- <sup>64</sup> It is interesting that Konrad Klejsa (*Filmowe oblicza kontestacji. Kino Stanów Zjednoczonych i Europy Zachodniej wobec kultury protestu przełomu lat 60. i 70.*, Trio, Warszawa 2008, p. 26-27), looking in Polish cinema for rebellion films does not take into account *Moving* at all. While he attributes rebellious elements to films which have nothing to do with contestation: inspired by French or Czech new wave in *The Structure of Crystal* (1969) by Zanussi or coming from Dreyer's cinema *Matthew's Days* (1967) by Leszczyński. If the author did not limit himself to hundred most popular Polish films he would find film examples much more adequate than the above-mentioned titles.
- <sup>65</sup> Cz. Dondziłło, *Zasłużony półkownik?*, "Film" 1982, No. 39, p. 7.
- <sup>66</sup> K. Kłosińska, *Feministyczne lektury "Dory"*, in: idem, *Feministyczna krytyka literacka*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2010, p. 555.
- <sup>67</sup> Cz. Dondziłło, op. cit.
- <sup>68</sup> P. Leszkowicz, T. Kitliński, *Miłość i demokracja. Rozważania o kwestii homoseksualnej w Polsce*, Aureus, Kraków 2005, p. 197. Hysterical symptoms – according to Leszkowicz and Kitliński interpreting Freud's thought – are the expression of compromise between libido and repression but they may also represent merger of two libido fantasies of contradictory sexual character. These two contradictory fantasies are related to the internal femininity and masculinity or heterosexuality and homosexuality of an individual and the conflict between them (ibidem).
- <sup>69</sup> W. Pszoniak, op. cit., p. 103.
- <sup>70</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*, trans. R. Hurley, Penguin, London 1998.
- <sup>71</sup> T. Basiuk, op. cit., p. 322.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibidem, p. 321.
- <sup>73</sup> Also in Poland at the end of 19th century homosexuality was associated with the figure of Wilde: *the nature of published [in newspapers] statements proved that public was well-informed about the reason of the "sad fame" of the writer, which on the other hand points to the existence of other, apart from the official, sources of information. There must have been shady news brought by foreigners and compatriots coming back from abroad, widespread in cafes and among "friends"* (A. Zawieszewska, "Zostawić całą hańbę", lecz "zwrócić się przeciw tyranii". *Poglądy na temat homoseksualizmu w pierwszej połowie XX wieku w Polsce*, in: *Kultura wobec odmienności*, v. 2, Prasa/Literatura, ed. B. Darska, Fundacja Feminoteka, Warszawa 2009, p. 98).
- <sup>74</sup> B. Gallagher, A. Wilson, *Michel Foucault: An Interview*, „Edinburgh Review” 1986, s. 58, quoted in C. Owens, *Outlaws: Gay Men in Feminism*, in: *Men in Feminism*, eds. A. Jardine, P. Smith, Routledge, New York-London 1987, p. 230.
- <sup>75</sup> E. Badinter, *XY: On Masculine Identity*, trans. L. Davis, Columbia University Press, New York 1995.
- <sup>76</sup> In this context it is worth recalling the realistic *Provincial Actors* (1978) in which Agnieszka Holland presented the story of a difficult friendship between actors – heterosexual Krzysztof (Tadeusz Huk) and homosexual Andrzej (Stefan Burczyk). *Sometimes I wonder* – says at certain point Krzysztof – *whether you are my friend or simply a gay in love*.
- <sup>77</sup> Kalina Jędrusik's eroticism, who was identified with Lucy Zucker, caused a scandal (see D. Michalski, *Kalina Jędrusik*, Iskry, Warszawa 2010, p. 313-323).
- <sup>78</sup> M. Karpiński, *Wojciech Pszoniak*, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1976, p. 52.
- <sup>79</sup> E. Nureżyńska-Fidelska, op. cit., p. 118.
- <sup>80</sup> P. Skrzypczak, op. cit., p. 140.
- <sup>81</sup> An exception are works by Elżbieta Ostrowska (*Obcość podwojona: obrazy kobiet żydowskich w polskim kinie powojennym*, in: *Gender-film-media*, ed. E. H. Oleksy, E. Ostrowska, Rabid, Kraków 2001) and Ewa Mazierska (E. Mazierska, *Masculinities in Polish, Czech and Slovak Cinema. Black Peters and Men of Marble*, Berghahn Books, New York-Oxford 2008, pp. 177-213). Also Tadeusz Lubelski considers the possibility to attribute homosexual identity to Moryc. The author notices that the protagonist loves his Polish friend but does not have many gay features. He is more like an adult child who is full of energy but lacks any idea how to gain male maturity (T. Lubelski, *Dwie ziemie jałowe...* op. cit., p. 126).
- <sup>82</sup> Differently than in the case of *Innocent Sorcerers* (1960) on the set of which Tadeusz Łomnicki himself suggested to the director to explain the inability to desire young and stripped off Pelagia with Bazyli's homosexuality (Krystyna Stypułkowska, see: *Historia filmu polskiego*, v. 4, ed. J. Toeplitz, Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, Warszawa 1980, p. 166).

<sup>83</sup> See A. Wajda, *Moment deziluzji. Spotkanie z Andrzejem Wajdą*, rozm. T. Sobolewski, "Kino" 1991, no. 7, p. 2-7.

<sup>84</sup> Reymont presents Polish capitalists as righteous, honest and noble and blames the fall of a Polish nobleman on the strangers: Jews and Germans. Polish national identity, as in nationalistic narratives, is created in opposition to the betrayal of strangers. The dot over the "i" is placed by the novel's ending – Karol's naive conversion, the finale that Wajda rightly threw away.

<sup>85</sup> K. Eberhardt, op. cit., p. 376.

<sup>86</sup> E. Mazierska, op. cit., pp. 192-193.

<sup>87</sup> E. Ostrowska, *Obcość podwojona...* op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140.

<sup>89</sup> Elżbieta Ostrowska is right writing (*Obcość podwojona...*, op. cit.) that the theme of *femme fatale* is thrown outside the bracket of national community because the Polish mother could be neither sexual nor bad. The director himself judges negatively Lucy's excessive sexuality as proven, for example, by parallel montage of the orgy in the restaurant car and image of copulating dogs that pure Anka fiercely tries to separate. This recognition is confirmed by Kalina Jędrusik who in 1979 admitted: *This is a role played at the director's bidding. (...) "To make it easier for you, I will tell you that this has to be a figure like from Fellini. Drawn with a thick line". I do not know why it was to*

*be so repulsive but this is what the director wanted. I had to give in and the difficult, hard days started. First of all he made me put on about ten kilos and worked very hard on it: he'd offer me sweets, before shooting I had to eat big breakfasts – Jesus I was so unhappy! And he would say: "You have to be round, full of milk, ruthless. You have to be a person that nobody loved"* (quote after: D. Michalski, op. cit., p. 315-316). Iwona Kurz claims on the other hand that the strength of the most sexual image in the Polish cinema (...) was developed in previous years in Kalina Jędrusik's earlier films ("*Bo we mnie jest seks*". *Kalina Jędrusik – retuszowana ikona seksbomby*, in: idem, *Twarze w tłumie, Wizerunki bohaterów wyobraźni zbiorowej w kulturze polskiej lat 1955-1969*, Świat Literacki, Warszawa 2005, p. 153,186). It is worth adding that the most critical towards Lucy are the feminists who see in her a strongly misogynist character, while she is loved by gay circles (Jędrusik has the status of gay diva/icon) – is it not because Zucker is a liberated woman, aware of her sexuality, a character who always gets what she wants, who does not let men decide about her body?

<sup>90</sup> E. Mazierska, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>91</sup> Ch. Caes, op. cit., p. 144.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 149.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 144.



*The Promised Land*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1974)

# Lithuanian Kin

The birth of adaptation out of the spirit of community

TADEUSZ LUBELSKI

The first time Tadeusz Konwicki commented on the practice of film adaptation was in a survey conducted in 1960 by “Kwaralnik Filmowy”, the participants of which were the three key screenwriters of the Polish Film School movement (apart from Konwicki, the group included Jerzy Stefan-Stawiński and Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski). By that time, Konwicki already had one film to his credit (*The Last Day of Summer /Ostatni dzień lata*, 1958/) and was in the process of making a second (*Zaduszki /All Saints’ Day*, 1961/). Still, at the time he was treated primarily as a writer who occasionally ventured into cinema, having recently written the successful adapted screenplay for *Mother Joan of the Angels (Matka Joanna od aniołów*, 1961) by Jerzy Kawalerowicz, based on Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s novella. His voice in the survey was that of experience; it belonged to someone prone to occasional turning of other people’s prose into screenplays.

## The Platonic Shared Interest

This early comment made by Konwicki attested to a fully formed sensibility of an artist, who will continue to use the tools of two different arts throughout his career. Konwicki makes a clear distinction between two kinds of cinema: the artistic film, which is *an art unto itself, autonomously creative* and the other, immense group of films *made for recreation; for the sake of watching. The recreational film surveys literature in search for elements of spectacle and pictorial beauty; it leans towards dramatic movement and effective architecture of the text*<sup>1</sup>. But since the authors of adapted screenplays are working for the sake of financial gain, they often – as mere craftsmen – do not have a full understanding of the literary text. *That is why we often see recreational movies that follow a great work of literature quite closely, and yet are nothing like that work: overwhelmingly weak and ungainly, devoid of that nourishing vitamin that art alone can provide.*

Things look differently in the case of the art film. Here, the author of the adapted screenplay approaches a classic text not because he or she is required to, or because of the nature of an assignment she or he was given, but rather because the adapted work is close to the author and contains elements that she or he would like to express anyway. It is the most Platonic form of sharing an interest between the author of the original work and the author of its adaptation. The adapter, by defending him- or herself [against outside meddling], automatically defends the author. In those circumstances even the boldest alterations of plot and dramatic structure are not damaging to the original work<sup>2</sup>.

Konwicki was optimistic about the possibility of translating literary forms of expression into the language of film. *You can, for example, quite faithfully recreate the author's stylistic choices, his narrative manner, as well as the temperature of the story, its climate and mood, since the latter two are often achieved by means of rhythm and a recurrence of refrains of some kind*<sup>3</sup>. At the same time he stated that, for him at least, film and literary activities are strictly separated. *I make a semi-conscious effort to separate the two in my own eyes, so that they do not overlap in any way, which would result in each losing its own particular juiciness. When I think of some themes or plans, they immediately fall – naturally and firmly – into one of those two strands. That is to say, if I chance upon an idea, I am not indifferent to whether it will become a book or a film. (...) And I would not like to turn my novels into films, or vice versa*<sup>4</sup>.

Konwicki remained faithful to that last rule. Not only had he refrained from adapting his own work, or the work of others. He also adamantly refused other directors the permission to adapt his own novels, from *A Dreambook for Our Time* (*Sennik współczesny*) to *Bohin Manor* (*Bohin*). In time, though, he started to yield. At first, he agreed to have his own prose adapted by others: he made the first exception in 1973, consenting – in the spirit of support for young and independent film directors of talent – to Krzysztof Wojciechowski's TV adaptation of *The Anthropos-spectre-beast* (*Zwierzoczekoupiór*), called *Skrzydła* (*Wings*). After that, Konwicki gave his permission to Andrzej Wajda to make his version of *Chronicle of Love Affairs* (*Kronika wypadków miłosnych*) in 1985 (that decision was made in the spirit of both admiration for a great director and of being touched by the fact that Wajda forgave Konwicki multiple jabs at his persona the writer made in his books). He even played himself in the film. Last but not least, he unsurprisingly agreed to a 1992 adaptation of *Minor Apocalypse* (*Mala apokalipsa*), directed by Costa-Gavras who played with the source material so loosely, the finished movie could hardly be still described in terms of *Platonic shared interest*.

Furthermore, Konwicki yielded in yet another respect: he started making adaptations himself. It happened twice: in 1981-1982 he made *The Issa Valley* (*Dolina Issy*), based on Czesław Miłosz's novel, and in 1988-1989 he wrote and directed *Lava* (*Lawa*), based on Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. In both cases, though, he showed great consequence in applying strict rules of the process which was in new to him. Interestingly enough, he did so in keeping with the understanding of adaptation he had expressed in the article quoted beforehand. Many years later, he was even more adamant about the issue. As he said in a mid-1980s interview to Stanisław Beres: *A literal translation of a book into a movie is an empty and futile job*<sup>5</sup>. However, he still saw the adapter-artist – making *even the boldest alterations of plot and dramatic structure*<sup>6</sup> of the source material – as an automatic and natural defender of the author. Still, he had a particular understanding of his own role as a director-adapter. This very particularity, as observed by analyzing his last two films, is the proper subject of this article.

### Reading His Kin

It should be noted that Konwicki's reluctance towards adapting other people's work did not apply to screenwriting as such. Even in the early phase of his work

in the film industry, he was eager to adapt other people's literary work for film purposes, albeit only with some other director in mind. Apart from the aforementioned *Mother Joan of the Angels*, he also adapted two other works for Jerzy Kawalerowicz: Bolesław Prus' *Pharaoh (Faraon)* and Julian Strykowski's *Austeria*. For Janusz Morgenstern, he adapted Stanisław Dygat's *Disneyland* (made into *Jowita*). Still, in all those cases – at least according to his own version of events – it was Konwicki who initiated the moviemaking process: he suggested particular books which he happened to like and admire to his friends <sup>7</sup>. (Despite many years that had passed, another script of his – based on Karol Wojtyła's *Brother of Our God /Brat naszego Boga/* – remains unfiled).

When it came to the choice of literary material to adapt, Konwicki's taste was not the ultimate criterion: what mattered were reasons both more grave and more personal. It is likely that in both cases some special situational circumstances played their part. The decision to adapt *The Issa Valley*, made immediately after Czesław Miłosz was awarded the literary Nobel Prize, was prompted by a unique need borne out of the historical moment. Konwicki himself explained his decision years later as an attempt to make up for the Polish literary world's mistreatment of Miłosz. Once the latter "chose freedom" [by emigrating to the United States], a series of "condemning pieces" began: all those *Poems for a Traitor* and works like *Before He's Forgotten*, after which Miłosz's fellow Polish writers did not do enough to make his work popular in his native country [where it was officially banned]. The moment was ripe for a Polish writer like Konwicki to make a "minor expiation" in order to clear the air just prior to the poet's return to his native country in all his Nobel glory <sup>8</sup>.

In fact, it is worth remembering that the idea was initiated by poet's own family. Konwicki mentions the fact in his diary in 1981, which was ultimately published by underground press: *I never before made movie based on someone else's prose. The idea didn't even cross my mind. It so happened that one afternoon I received a call from the Miłosz's sister-in-law, Grażynka Miłoszowa, who presented me with a certain idea-plot-affair. She and her fiends decided that I'm the only one capable of turning "The Issa Valley" into a film. Surprisingly, this risky idea didn't surprise me in the slightest, even though I wouldn't have come up with it myself in a million years. (...) But it was then and there that trouble arose. Mr. Czesław wasn't enthusiastic. He used many excuses, listing possible problems with the adaptation. He nagged long enough to discourage me. And I'm his fellow cancer (...).*

*Still, suddenly, out of the blue, the telephone rings one afternoon and Mr. Czesław's voice pours from the receiver; (...) that Lithuanian-Vilnian cooled warmth, that kindness not truly kind and a permission harsher than forbidding. (...) In any case, he said what he said. We struck a deal across 12 thousand kilometers. As for me, I was still unsure of my situation, totally confused, perplexed by foreboding – and started calling up folks in Warsaw, in order to summon my crew, consisting of the genetic natives of the lands in the delta of Niemen, Wilia and Niewiaża <sup>9</sup>.*

In the second case, taking place several years later, the starting point was an entirely personal encounter with the literary work at hand. For symmetry, let me quote Konwicki's account once again: *Somewhere in mid-1980s I started thinking of Mickiewicz's "Forefathers' Eve" all over again. Not as a grand patriotic work*

*corresponding with the martial law [imposed in 1981], though. The poem was returning to me from someplace far apart, perhaps from Nowa Wilejka, as a contemporary work: poetry written by someone the same age as me.*

*And thus one night I reached to a bookshelf behind my sofa and pulled out a tattered volume, used by both my daughters when they went to school. (...) What I read struck me as a work of a thoroughly contemporary poet. It could have been written in America, or New Zealand. The poet was clearly struggling with his mere existence, doubting and rebelling, getting entangled in mundane duties and everlasting remorse. He was at once furious and continually disarmed for every second of the day by a melancholy feeling, which will not leave him till the day he dies. The poet was desperately looking for salvation in his poetry, even though this salvation would forever stay out of his reach*<sup>10</sup>.

The common feature of both those situations is obvious: there is a palpable need for sharing, through cinematic means, a “testimony of reading” the work of two great Polish writers. However, the testimony is not of some imaginary, virtual reading (as defined by Alicja Helman<sup>11</sup>), but of the very personal, private act of reading, offered by a fellow artist. It is by assuming that perspective that one can explain the uncommon, unique choice of the two adapted authors. Both are masters, but also familiar masters – “one’s own”. Tadeusz Konwicki mentioned repeatedly – often half-jokingly – that back in Wileńszczyzna (Vilnius Region), which is one big province unto itself, everyone was related to everyone else: *Everybody married everybody else vertically and diagonally, tightening and entangling ties of blood. Everyone in those parts was but a piece of a mysterious community. One of my high school friends was even named Mickiewicz*<sup>12</sup>. Incidentally, Czesław Miłosz (just as jokingly, of course) was prone to more explicit explanations of those all-encompassing blood ties. He often recalled his paternal grandfather: *a great nobleman, fingers all crooked from stagecoach racing, he fought in the January Uprising [of 1863] and was not even sent to Siberia. He added: Apart from that, he singlehandedly populated the entire county, which is thus full of my relatives*<sup>13</sup>.

Many years later, commenting on the choice of those two works for film adaptations in an interview I conducted with him, Konwicki mentioned – in all seriousness – the metaphorical understanding of this Lithuanian affinity: (...) *I did it not because I happened to want to make a film and I was in search for a plot; there were certain circumstances of the era, of mood and moral compensations that made me adapt “The Issa Valley” and “Forefathers’ Eve”. Both authors are my relatives: maybe not in a literal sense of shared blood ties (even though in Wileńszczyzna everyone was related to everyone else), but within the family of Europe, within the commonality of the land, of custom and of those remnants of Romanticism that were still floating around, like the spirits of the woods of Vilnius*<sup>14</sup>.

I may add that it was not an accident that Konwicki embarked upon adapting these two literary works only once his artistic position was sufficiently grounded: namely, after the publication of his most important books: *A Dreambook for Our Time, The Ascention (Wniebowstąpienie), The Calendar and the Hourglass (Kalendarz i klepsydra), The Polish Complex (KOMPLEKS POLSKI), Minor Apocalypse and Bohin Manor* – as well as after his single most important film: *Faraway, So Close (Jak daleko stąd, jak blisko, 1973)*. Only after achieving such artistic stature

could Konwicki seriously stand in a single imaginary row with his metaphorical relatives: Mickiewicz and Miłosz – as the one who comes after them and overhears various voices and shreds of consciousness in order to unify them again; as one who gathers various threads of someone else’s fate and weaves them into his own, deeply personal work.

### Turning Wileńszczyzna into Myth

All it takes is a close look at Konwicki’s filmography that helps to arrive at one basic conclusion: this consummate purveyor of film adaptation reserved a special group of literary works for his personal direction – those created by his “Lithuanian kinsmen”: artists who not only belonged to the same community with him, but also were his predecessors in terms of artistic strategy. The strategy can be defined as communicating with the community of readers/viewers by means of mythologizing Wileńszczyzna.

The choice of words itself suggests the ambiguity of the process, which Konwicki himself acknowledges. It is not by accident that the chapter of his memoirs devoted to the making of *Lava* is entitled *What If I Were from Bydgoszcz*, thus alluding to Antoni Slonimski’s joke, according to which it is doubtful what Konwicki could do if had not been exploring the Vilnius mythology. *They say I exploit Romanticism, Mickiewicz, the [secret societies of] Philomates and the Philarets. Yes, I do feed off Vilnius. But to explode in a Vilniusian patriotic fit; to start crying any tearing hair off my head – that I don’t know how to do*<sup>15</sup>.

It was by degrees that Konwicki achieved such highly developed, self-ironic consciousness. It has been noted before that Konwicki started his literary activity by entering into a Marxist polemic with Romanticism, with Marxism *representing common sense at that particular time*. Maria Janion gave a convincing interpretation of *Rojsty*, Konwicki’s debut novel, reading it as a deliberate and subtle demystification of a consciousness formed by Polish Romanticism (with Konwicki’s own mind as the novel’s main focus). As the years progressed, though, the Romanticism he once chased out of the door started to come back through the window, with the unofficially published *The Polish Complex* becoming a single-handed “Romantic revival” of sorts. Janion calls this particular outlook *a Kresovian Romantiscism – both because it takes place in the Kresy [which literally mean The Borderland] and because its fundamental idea is to reach the ultimate limits*<sup>16</sup>.

Small wonder, then, that it is *The Polish Complex* (a key work in more ways than one, not only for Konwicki but for the culture of People’s Republic of Poland as such) that includes a self-reflexive essay, which serves as the best explanation of the writer’s awareness of mythologizing of his own land that he himself is perpetrating. I will quote but a brief fragment, which speaks to the very issues under discussion: *Europe has many corners in which several ethnic groups commingled without melting into one entity; [places where] many languages are spoken and colorful communities, customs and religions abound. But my neck of the woods, my Wileńszczyzna, seems more beautiful to me – better, more solemn, more magical. After all, I also toiled to beautify the myth of that border region between Europe and Asia, the cradle of European nature and Asian demons, the flowery valley of eternal peace and human friendship.*



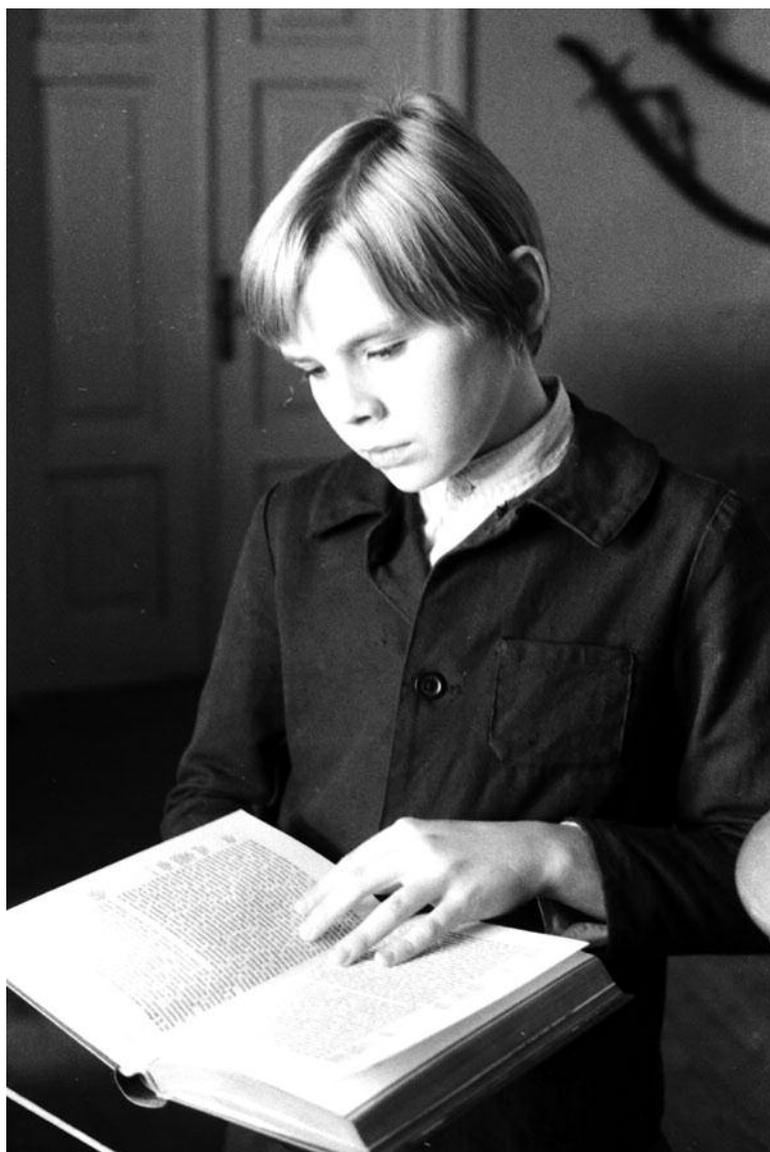
*The Issa Valley*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1982)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

*I beautified it for so long, I finally believed the idealized country to be true. Love was stronger there than anywhere else, flowers grew bigger there, people had more humanity in them than at any other place else in this wide world*<sup>17</sup>.

It can be easily argued that this idealization of a lost land of childhood is the most obvious – not to say most banal – trait of all émigré writings, which by its very nature ceaselessly reproduce the motif of paradise lost. Czesław Miłosz wrote about this, adding that images conjured up in this kind of a process have an existential dimension, related not so much to the physical, but to the temporal distance. After all, everyone is forever getting further and further away from one’s childhood, no matter how many and how winding roads did they travel. *We can easily imagine an old emigrant, who – while meditating on the country of his youth – realizes that it is not only kilometers that divide him from it, but also the wrinkles on his face and silver hair on his head – the marks left by that severe border patrolman called Time*<sup>18</sup>.

However, this existential aspect is very consciously connected in Konwicki’s artistic strategy to another, indeed deciding factor that calls upon the emotions of an entire community – namely, the mythology of Kresy. As we know from rich literature of the subject, the mere definition of Kresy changed within Polish culture of the last century or so. At the beginning, around mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Kresy’s “founding myth” is *Mohort*, Wincent Pol’s “knight rhapsody” published in 1854), the term signified *a stretch of land between rivers Dnieper and Dniester, bearing immense significance for the ancient Republic of Poland as the furthestmost military outpost, defending Poland from Tartars and Ukrainian tribes*<sup>19</sup>. Even then, though, the idea of Kresy existed but as a memory – it functioned as a myth, *a reminder of a cause as great and heroic as it was lost*<sup>20</sup>.



*The Issa Valley*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1982)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

It was very quickly – as early as in the 1860s – that the territorial meaning of the term began to expand, incorporating wider and wider stretches of the Eastern parts of former Poland. It was not until the interwar period of 1918-1939 that Kresy incorporated the lands once belonging to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and former Eastern Galicia, so that the most important cities of Kresy became Vilnius and Lviv, both of which were never before associated with Kresy, since they both used to be located towards the center of Poland. A “Kresy propaganda” of sorts was introduced into schools and civic education. So-called External Kresy, formally outside of the new borders of the Poland reborn in 1918, lost their significance: the real Kresy

were the “Internal Kresy”, namely the Eastern voivodeships of Second Republic of Poland, treated as material for “purposeful integration”. Ultimately, after Second World War, the lost Kresy became “the territory of longing”, per their monographer Tadeusz Chrzanowski. Accordingly, Kresy became synonymous in today’s Poland with the Eastern outskirts of former Poland, lost to the Soviet Union after World War Two. Since this contemporary meaning of Kresy was heavily influenced by Romantic literature, Vilnius and Wileńszczyzna are still the most sensitive parts of the “territories of longing” and it is not by accident that the cover of Chrzanowski’s book includes a 19<sup>th</sup> century drawing of the Gate of Dawn [of the church of Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius] <sup>21</sup>. Fascination with Wileńszczyzna has even deeper historical roots. Poland was at the peak of its power during the reign of Jagiellonian dynasty, which was itself Lithuanian, and the Lublin Union [of 1569] joining Poland with Lithuania was an exemplary case of *peaceful expansion, respecting the religious and linguistic freedoms* <sup>22</sup>. Kresy signify, then, less a territory where crucial events took place, but rather a mythic, multi-cultural space, representing a collective, still relevant and never-fulfilled Polish promise.

It is worth mentioning that the very nobleness of such a definition was often questioned, if only for the sake of counterargument. Idealization of Kresy often led to Kresovian megalomania; the Kresy myth itself is treated more and more often – to use Leszek Szaruga’s formulation – as *sentimental self-delusion on the part of Poles* <sup>23</sup>. Maria Janion has suggested that Polish sense of superiority towards the Kresy natives stems from Polish inferiority complex towards the West. *Colonized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by occupying powers* [of Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary], *we prided ourselves on having once been colonizers, too*, notes Janion, reminding at another point that the Kresy gentry spawned not only valiant knights such as Mohort, but also many cruel and tyrannous individuals <sup>24</sup>. The most <sup>25</sup> thorough historical narrative of the Polish presence in Kresy – written by Daniel Beauvois – serves at the same time as the most serious attempt at dismantling the Kresovian mythology. It is by mentioning Daniel Beauvois’ research that Bogusław Bakula makes his point about the Polish narrative of Kresy as being an expression of “a colonial mind”, even if – luckily enough – it does not lead nowadays *to enslaving of anyone, save perhaps the Poles themselves* <sup>26</sup>.

Tadeusz Konwicky, whose writing contained a “Kresologian discourse” all its own, was conscious of that ambiguity from the very start. It was early on that he assumed a set of rules that he then successfully followed. He wrote about it further in the previously quoted essay, a mere paragraph down from where we left off: *There was a day, or rather a moment – at the very start of my wimpy literary career – when I told myself I will obey solely one commandment: Thou shalt not use thy word against a member of a different tribe. Thou shalt not use a metaphor, an emotional parable, a moral tendency against another man of different religion or a different language. I might have sinned against my very own, but I never sinned against the other* <sup>27</sup>.

By following this rule, Konwicky stuck to the trail blazed by his predecessors: one poet [Adam Mickiewicz], who finished his national Polish poem with an appendix entitled *To My Moscow Friends* and another [Czesław Miłosz], who closed [*The Captive Mind*], his world-famous book of essays on the nature of enslavement with a chapter called *The Lesson of the Baltics*. By deciding to adapt their respective

work, Konwicki knew that even had he made *the boldest alterations of plot and dramatic structure*, he will automatically defend the authors, since he found in them *a trace of something I would myself like to contain in the work*<sup>28</sup>. And since in both cases he attempted a dialogue with his viewers through the stories of his *Vilnius motherland*, he felt – as an author – as a representative of a certain *community of kinship*.

Even while hand-picking his film crews, Konwicki had the “representative” factor in mind, even though the “representation” was marked differently in various cases. When working on *The Issa Valley*, he tried to assemble a crew of people of Vilnius Region ancestry: his art director was his school-time friend Andrzej Borecki, his cinematographer Jerzy Łukaszewicz was a member of a Vilnius family, together with his twin brother [and famous actor] Olgierd – even though both were born in Chorzów. Almost all of the actors playing main parts in the movie had Kresovian roots: Hanna Skarżanka (born in Minsk and educated in Vilnius; I can still recall the way Konwicki directed her as she was singing her guitar song: *Hania, don't sing just “woman”*; *stress the “o”, dear, the way we do in Vilnius*), Danuta Szaflarska (born near Nowy Sącz, but based in Vilnius throughout the war), Edward Dziewoński (a Kresy native, though born in Moscow), and – the youngest of them all – Maria Pakulnis, born to a Polish-Lithuanian family... In *Lava*, several key parts were cast with actors from behind Poland's Eastern border. When one of the key fragments of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* – Adolph's monologue – is spoken by a Lithuanian actor Arunas Smailis (whose only knowledge of Polish came from Konwicki's assistants just prior to the shoot), the [Polish] viewer has some trouble understanding the lines, but she or he also realizes that the director is pulling them into a sense of kinship with one of the neighboring “small nations”. When in a scene at the Senator's ball one sees two Russian actors, Aleksandr Novikow and Sergei Zhygunov (playing Bestuzhev and one of the officers), with the latter laying his Russian accent on thickly upon his line: *Small wonder they curse us here* – the viewer sees it as a possible contemporary comment. Still, at all times the voice that matters most is that of the “next of kin” – the voice of the poem's author.

### **The Niewiaża, the Vilenka, the Czarna Hańcza Valley...**

In Konwicki's mock-diary, published unofficially in 1981 as *Moonrise, Moonset* (*Wschody i zachody księżycy*) – seven years after proposing, in *The Calendar and the Hourglass*, the term lie-diary [łże-dziennik], later degraded by too many imitators for us to use it now – the theme of making the film of *The Issa Valley* plays like a tormented leitmotif. This first film adaptation all his own – made at a remarkable time when liberty suddenly broke into People's Republic of Poland, with Miłosz's name still totally banned mere months prior – was a daredevil task. *You are making a movie of “The Issa Valley”? Wonderful, marvelous! We are so happy; Tazio, this will be, this has to be a remarkable event! I'm being fed those compliments day in and day out. I can't groan, I can't make a face, I can't moan. It needs to be a masterpiece, for it's based on the work of a Nobel Prize winner. Just try making anything less than a masterpiece, and the nation will break every bone in your body*<sup>29</sup>.

The chief difficulty lied not in Miłosz's freshly bestowed Nobel glory, but in the inherent non-filmic quality of the source novel. The book itself, first published

in Paris in 1955 but unavailable in Poland until 1981, is closer in its formula to a classic *Bildungsroman*, dealing with the main character's gaining of maturity and re-packaged as an autobiographical essay (combined with a pastiche of various forms of educational literature), than to plot-driven prose. The outline of the action is completely dependent of the narrator's perspective, which belongs in fact to the poet<sup>30</sup>, who utilizes the thinnest of veils to disguise himself. On the surface, the narrator focuses squarely on the experience of a 10 year old boy named Tomaszek, but the child's point of view is in fact assumed extremely rarely, and even then with palpable detachment. In fact, for the narrator of *The Issa Valley*, the memory of childhood is but a starting point for a process recreating the past by an adult. It is a starting point for recreating the fates of people who young Tomasz knew – with the narrator using his contemporary knowledge and sensitivity.

*The Issa Valley* narrator is not hiding his personal identity in its youthful incarnation. For example, as he reminisces about the little boy growing up with a sense of allegiance to two motherlands at once, he adds that then *constant invoking of the words "we" and "our country" nurtured in Thomas his later distrust whenever heated reference was made in his presence to any flags or emblems*. Later, commenting a conversation Tomasz is having with his grandfather in a library, he speaks of a seed being sowed and suggests that this first, childish intellectual initiation was to result in the future toil of poetry-writing<sup>31</sup>. The novel gains its fullest and richest flavor in this very back and forth: the narrator keeps remembering himself around the age of (around) ten, including all the things he saw and experienced then. Still, at the same time, he cannot and does not want to limit himself to this perspective – his interest in the past lies mainly in how it facilitated the growth of the man he ultimately became.

Still, had that been Konwicki's intention in the first place, he could have probably – despite all implied difficulty – create a film equivalent of the narration that would shift between both perspectives. After all, we already saw him stating that *you can [by cinematic means] quite faithfully recreate the author's (...) narrative manner, as well as the temperature of the story, its climate and mood*<sup>32</sup>. His intent as an adapter was apparently different this time, though. One can reconstruct it by looking closely at the triple opening of the film: for *The Issa Valley* starts three times, as it were, every time introducing a different narrative approach.

The beginning proper, which accompanies the opening credits, is the first of key synthetic sequences, which then get repeated twice and which themselves incorporate a medley of portraits of the inhabitants of the eponymous valley. At this early stage of the film, the viewer is not yet able to identify them. It is only in hindsight that one can recognize the following characters: a girl serving as a maid in the grandparents' house, aunt Helena looking at the sunset, a Russian convict in hiding (later shot by Balthazar), Barbarka running up the hill in tears, Balthazar himself (unable to collect himself), Romuald riding a horse and leading another one to a date with Helena – as well as, sandwiched in between all this, a stranger: the girl who will never again reappear in the movie. Even at the very first moment, when the credit (*Film Cooperative "Perspective" Presents a Film Based on a Novel by Czesław Miłosz*) is interposed over an image of a young servant girl singing a Lithuanian song while playing carefree in the garden, the sequence can be seen as idyllic. Still, in a matter of seconds – from the title credit onwards – the images rap-

idly become more and more sinister, accompanied by Zygmunt Konieczny's musical theme (strings are obsessively repeating a sound suggestive of bird shrieks, with the sounds of the valley – bells tolling, horses neighing, hooves beating against the ground – completing the soundscape). The tone shifts and becomes anything but idyllic. The viewer can feel that the unsettling tone of the opening sequence is suggested by an external narrator, attaching his own commentary to on-screen events. It is as if he was saying: the world you will see during the screening is different from the one you know; more beautiful on one hand, but also scarier and darker; only children can play there, adults may live their lives more intensely and in a full, but they are still struggling with their destiny and will not be able to escape it.

It is after that sequence is over that the second beginning arrives: a postcard view of an American metropolis [of New York City], accompanied by an off-screen voice of an older man, preceded by a beat with an interposed voice of a younger man, singing those same lines at the piano. After a while the man's face appears in close-up, with the big city lights in the background: *Back in my motherland, where I'm not coming back, / There's a lake great in size...*<sup>33</sup>. It may be Czesław Miłosz's most widely known poem – written, contrary to what one may expect while reading it, in Warsaw in 1937, and not in emigration. It was chosen to accompany the scene for a double reason: so that every viewer could easily identify the narrator and in order to make the icon of a man in exile complete.

The third beginning: a close-up of a boy, who may be yawning out of sleepiness, but is still intently watching a scene he is a part of (the close-up suggests that it is through the boy's eyes that we are watching the scene ourselves). It is a serene evening inside a manor house, the servants (who were earlier seen putting out candles towards the end of the first sequence) are singing next to spinning wheels, then we see the grandmother *warming her rump* near the stove and a grandfather sneaking towards a shotgun hanging on the wall. It is now that the viewer is beginning to discern something that can be called the beginning of a plot – and the reader of the source novel can recognize the key characters of it.

Seemingly, out of the three narrative perspectives presented in the three beginnings of the film, it is the third one that serves as an equivalent of one of the two perspectives used in the novel – the one employing a child's gaze upon the world. Still, it is not quite the case. After all, Miłosz openly played down the autobiographical aspect of *The Issa Valley*<sup>34</sup>, when the director of the film – by juxtaposing Tomaszek's glances with Miłosz's most famous poem – is trying to play up this very aspect. The director openly declared: *The book impressed me in its entanglement with Miłosz's biography with the ethos of a pilgrim, the magic of Wileńszczyzna and the interposing of those elements upon Europe itself. That is why I chose the means I chose: to reach those very purposes*<sup>35</sup>.

The said “means” make the three perspectives employed in the film align according to a certain logic, dictated by the aforementioned triple opening of the movie: first the perspective of an external narrator, seeking the most efficient way to represent the emotional uniqueness of the world of the valley; second the perspective of Miłosz who – using means all his own – is realizing the very same purpose, thus becoming the “voice of the valley”; and third: the point of view of Miłosz as a *child who is becoming a poet*, and thus remains – at least for the time being – one of many witnesses whose perspective is occasionally assumed, such

as those of Balthazar, Romuald and Barbarka – all of whom had a chance of becoming poets, too.

All those perspectives are dominated by the primary figure – that of the director-adapter <sup>36</sup>, who goes as far to signal his presence as to attach his own signature to the film at hand. In the film's centerpiece – the scene showing moviemaking itself – camera lens sharply reflexes the intent face of Tadeusz Konwicki looking ahead. I see the scene as the film's centerpiece because it is within it that all the narrative perspectives come together. The actor Józef Duriasz wanders off (seemingly by chance) onto the set from the world of Tomaszek; it was only in the previous scene that he played Józef Czarny, making an intervention after the attempt on the boy's life. Now, the actor wears a contemporary outfit and plays Czesław Miłosz – he recites his poem called *The Cloud* (written in 1935 and thus the oldest of the ones used in the film, taken from the Vilnius collection entitled *Three Winters*). Still, the set he wanders into belongs to Tadeusz Konwicki. The scene about to be shot – that of Nazis preparing to conduct a mass execution – could belong to any of the movies the director made thus far: even to *The Last Day of Summer* (had that movie used a flashback sequence with rolling tanks instead of a more ambiguous image of flying planes), not to mention *All Saints' Day*, *Summer Sault* (*Salto*) or *Faraway, So Close*. What is most important, Józef Czarny (Duriasz) walking down the set (from right to left, thus violating the respected cinematic convention, but mimicking the movements of the emigrants from East towards the West <sup>37</sup>) is a signature Konwicki's character – a wanderer, a pilgrim, moving through space but mostly seeking for self-knowledge <sup>38</sup>. In order to trigger those metaphors, two parallel motifs are employed and present in the second half of the scene: the motif of a train passing by and that of the clouds, which also happen to be illustrating the recited poem.

One might say that the director-adapter revealed in that scene is both an artist and a reader; he is somebody who collects various images of the world and eavesdrops on its voices. As he does that, at the same time – being the author of *The Issa Valley* – he submits those images and sounds to a discipline of a distinctive order. One can observe this very process on all three narrative levels we have distinguished so far.

First of all, the process takes place on the plane of the initiation narrative of Tomaszek's life, whose childlike point of view is assumed very often in the movie. It is through the boys' eyes that the viewer sees the bathing Magdalena; it is thanks to his gaze that we witness the killing of the rooster by one of the servants; and it is the image of Tomaszek gazing ahead that opens both the sequence of the Bukowski party and the Easter scene in front of the church. None of those scenes contains so much as a trace of suggestion that Tomaszek understands more of those situations than a normal child would under the circumstances. Tomaszek may see a lot, but still he does not know of the affair Mr. Romuald is having with aunt Helena, so that when Barbarka decides in a fit of rage to turn away from a journey she started, it is him who is chiefly disoriented by that sudden decision. What is more, it happens that assuming Tomaszek's point of view serves exactly the purpose of showing how limited the child's perspective is. When the priest gives the last sacraments to the grandmother, Tomaszek is removed from the room and even though he gazes upon the scene from a window, his gaze stops at a snail making

its way. World abounds with interesting details: a child, in choosing some of them as objects of attention, uses its own, childish criteria.

Still, the mechanism of memory is very much at work; it is thanks to it that a mere collection of impressions gathered by a child can be transformed – through understanding triggered but in hindsight – into a series of different stories, parallel to that of Tomaszek, but organized by separate perspectives belonging to several inhabitants of the Valley. The eyes of Masiulis, the local medicine man, look piercingly at Balthazar; then the same pair of eyes are surprised by a love scene they witness between Helena and Romuald. The viewer will twice witness Masiulis letting go of his magical powers; since he already saw what he saw, he needs no magic to answer Barbarka and Balthazar. Of the two gazes by Barbarka – the first loving, directed upon the bathing Romuald, the second desperate, witnessing the man's infidelity – a cunning plan is born. Most scenes that involve Balthazar are perceived by the viewer from Balthazar's point of view: it is through the eyes of this young gamekeeper that we follow his struggle with the devil (which is his own conscience), and it is right along with him that viewer seems to be shooting at the Russian convict, and then goes to the Rabbi to get some advice.

This last example offers a good opportunity to see how all the scenes we mentioned so far – even if all of them are present in the novel and the dialogue we hear within them comes from Miłosz's book, which remains the case for the entire film – uniformly become a part of Konwicki's world, since they are conjured by purely cinematic means. As soon as he started to “dismantle” Miłosz's novel, Konwicki noticed – as he mentions in *Moonrise, Moonset* – how surprisingly similar it is to the prose of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. One of the multiple proofs of that was a covert inclusion into the novel of the character of Father Suryn of Iwaszkiewicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels*, divided into two separate characters in *The Issa Valley*: those of Balthazar and the priest named Peikswa. The motif of crime and redemption after committing a mortal sin – and the motif of seeking tzadik's advice. It was during the making of this very scene in Jerzy Kawalerowicz's film of *Mother Joan...* that Konwicki suggested that both the rabbi and the priest should be played by the same actor, Mieczysław Voit. *The ploy was to encode in the viewer's subconscious how impossible the situation was to resolve, how universal human sin is, how helpless are we when facing fate, doom and providence (...). What should I do with Balthazar's visit to the Rabbi in “The Issa Valley”? How to put this scene together, so that it does not repeat the intellectual tropes and the tonal qualities already sucked dry by other filmmakers, as well as by myself in “Mother Joan...” twenty years ago?*<sup>39</sup>

The answer is provided by one of the finished film's most beautiful scenes. At first, it seems the scene is following Miłosz's novel closely: Balthazar waits for a long time, then gets questioned by the bearded secretary of the Rabbi, after which Rabbi himself appears – *an elfin figure with girlish features* – and gives Balthazar advice in a speech, translated by the secretary and taken directly from the novel. *He says: “No-man-is-good.” (...). He says: “Whatever-wrong-you-have-commited-man-that-and-only-that-is-your-fate.” (...). He says: “Do-not-curse-your-fate-man-whoever-thinks-he-has-another-and-not-his-own-is-lost-and-will-be-damned-forever. Think-not-of-the-life-that-might-have-been-for-such-a-life-would-not-have-been-yours”.* *He stopped speaking*<sup>40</sup>. Still, it is undeniable that the scene has a flavor all its own, thanks to the director. At first, in its early part, it

takes place in darkness and has a fast rhythm due to the hurried strut of the Jew walking down the corridor, carrying the lamp and passing several elders, all whispering nervously and wearing halats and yarmulkes. The image is accompanied by the bird-like strings of Konieczny's score, connected in the film to scenes of particular import to the characters' lives and fates. The scene's dream-like status is further reinforced by the fact that the long corridor leads to a bakery and the images of Balthazar being questioned by the old secretary are accompanied by those of half-naked girls serving rolls fresh out of the ovens. The remarkable cast is a factor, as well: the Rabbi is played with panache by Joanna Szczepkowska, trained for a long time by Julian Strykowski himself<sup>41</sup>, and her Yiddish lines are translated into Polish by Włodzimierz Boruński, playing the secretary and speaking with a Kresovian lilt – it is the same Boruński who Konwicki turned into a very icon of a Jew in his *All Saints' Day*<sup>42</sup>.

This and similar directorial choices help to fully grasp the meaning of “auteur adaptation” mentioned by Konwicki: as a “family member”, coming from the same Kresovian community, the adapter can evoke episodes once experienced by the very young Czesław Miłosz and make them into integral parts of his own work of art – as well as make them subordinate to the rules he dictates himself. This way, he does not distort them, and instead ascribes them new meanings. The same strategy is employed by Konwicki the adapter when it comes to Miłosz's poems, which Konwicki selected himself and used in the film in an entirely new function. This new function is determined by the fact that the poems are being recited by actors wearing contemporary costumes – the same actors who in remaining scenes play the main characters of the story<sup>43</sup>.

The collection of chosen poems forms a composition all its own, which in fact reinforces the emotional power of the film. I already mentioned that *The Cloud*, the desperation-soaked poem recited by Józef Duriasz, is included in Konwicki's personal vision. It is only the seventh and final poem of the set – *So Little* (Berkeley 1969) – which speaks of poetic activity itself and is recited against the background of American skyscrapers by the actor Igor Śmiałkowski (who physically resembles Miłosz and also plays the part of priest Monkiewicz), that is a direct allusion to the Nobel Prize-winning poet and appears right before the film's final image. Even though the first poem in the film – *In My Motherland* – helps to identify the author of all the poetry quoted in *The Issa Valley*, the fact that it is being recited by Zdzisław Tobiasz – whose portrait can be spotted in the grandfather's office (where it hangs as “a likeness of an ancestor”) and who later on appears in a Nazi uniform on the film set – makes one realize that the nostalgia contained in the poem was and is felt by many people belonging to different generations. The function of the four remaining poems is similar. Two of them, taken from the war cycle *The World (Naïve Poems)* which was an attempt at redefining the basic feelings and needs, are recited by people who only happen to be visiting America: *From the Window* is spoken by Tadeusz Bradecki (ksiądz Peikswa) looking as if fresh off the immigrant boat; *The Sun* by Jerzy Kamas (Romuald), who most resembles Konwicki himself (it is as if he was attending a literary meeting overseas, and his hotel nights were riddled with scary ghosts of occupation and politics).

The most meticulous mise en scène accompanies two poems which are afforded the sharpest meaning by the director. Marek Walczewski (Masiulis, the medicine

man) seems to be a walking symbol of a man deserted by everything and everyone: with his military coat on his shoulders, he speaks the lines of the haunting poem *Child of Europe*, written in New York City in 1946 and proclaiming the dramatic instability of all human attachments (*Love no country... Throw away keepsakes... Do not love people...*<sup>44</sup>). The actor is positioned in front of three subsequent places of worship: a synagogue, a Russian Orthodox shrine and a Catholic church. Last but not least, Krzysztof Gosztyła (Balthazar, the one character in *The Issa Valley* who is closest to Konwicki's signature literary characters, struggling and bound by the inevitable nature of their life stories) is a figure of a rebel: holding a bunch of documents under his arm, wearing a costume suggesting a contemporary political activist, he stands opposite a grave of an activist of 1863 and recites the poem *Your Voice* from the rebellious 1968, which declares the utter helplessness felt in the face of someone else's suffering. The self-ironic commentary to the last words of the poem (*and then you're scared of being sentenced for the fact of not being able to do anything*) can be easily recognized by the viewers familiar with the hoarse growl of Konwicki's own voice, damaged due to illness but still carried by its Vilnian lilt. It is Konwicki who lends his voice to the old gravedigger, who is seen twice as he conducts the ceremony of burying Magdalena, who died by her own hand. First, at the end of the funeral service, he shouts towards his young helpers: *C'mon, boys. We gotta close it down!* Then, when Magdalena's head has to be severed for fear of further haunting, he speaks again as he hands the shovel to his sidekick: *That's the sharp one, you know what to do.* It is as if the director himself, by employing this self-reflexive wink, wanted to remind the viewers that he is one of the Issa Valley's natives himself.

In fact, the main activity in adapting the source novel seems to lie in depriving the depicted episodes of their fictional status – it is as if the director was trying to make the viewer realize that each of the events he presents could have in fact taken place (or simply had taken place) in reality. I recall that when I was a reporter on the set of *The Issa Valley*, I thought to myself that it is not really the fictional river of Issa that was being presented – it was all about the actual rivers of Niewiaża (crucial to Miłosz's childhood), Vilenka (crucial to Konwicki) and the most real of all: Czarna Hańcza, on the banks of which the crew was stationed and waters of which bathed Jerzy Kamas when he played Balthazar. I entitled the piece I wrote at that time *Three Rivers*<sup>45</sup>, forgetting about at least one extra river: that of Lega, at which Olecko is located, where a miracle [involving a bleeding cross] occurred in the summer of 1981 and remains recorded by the director in the contemporary parts of the film. Today, I believe that every single viewer can put her or his own river into the blank spot. The wondrous land of Kresy, which embodies the collective allegiance of the Poles, is a place defined by a private myth in Konwicki's film – a myth that envelops every person's most important allegiance: that to one's own self.

### Polish Night of Wonders

The success of *The Issa Valley* was such that it may well have given courage to Konwicki to tackle a project as wildly ambitious as to make a film adaptation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*. This poetic drama – the single most brilliant

work ever written in Polish language – is at the very least a double trap for anyone interested in turning it into a film. The first level of trap is the poem's open structure; it has unfinished nature and the complete separation between every one of its four parts (written between 1820 and 1832), which seem to be joint together solely by force of bearing the same title. That trap is relevant even when *Forefathers' Eve* is produced on the stage – for which it was originally written – and becomes nearly insurmountable when faced with the need of literal treatment and condensation to two hours of screen time (no one ever dared to turn *Forefathers' Eve* into a film). The second level of the trap is connected to the vast tradition of philological and hermeneutic scholarship focused on Mickiewicz's work, as well as the tradition of its multiple stage versions, which were themselves conflicting<sup>46</sup>. Every year brings new scholarship and new productions, making it more and more challenging for every next Polish director to tackle *Forefathers' Eve* anew.

It is with masterly ease that Konwicki avoided both traps, thanks to his initial idea, which followed suggestions by a pair of his most trusted advisors. The first was Mickiewicz himself, who – commenting on *Forefathers' Eve* in the foreword to the French edition in 1834 – pointed out two main elements that unify the separate parts of the poem. *The folk ritual of the Night of Forefathers' Eve, the day of the dead and conjuring of the spirits by repeatedly gathering together the characters of the drama, ties the entire action into a single entity – just as the mysterious character appearing at various points in the drama grants it a particular unity*<sup>47</sup>. This double starting point is assumed by the adapter of Mickiewicz's text – the entire action of the film takes place during a single night of the dead, from dusk till dawn. The persistent mythical power of that event not only connects all the parts of the drama, but also serves as a bridge between itself and the contemporary era, granting the work a truly timeless dimension. Not only seems it perfectly natural that during the night of the dead Guślarz, the master of ceremonies, meets the “mysterious character” Mickiewicz talked of – it is just as natural that in the first scene taking place in the cemetery, shot at the Powązki cemetery in Warsaw in 1988, the viewer recognizes contemporary Poles celebrating the modernized [and Christianized] Day of the Dead [namely All Saint's Day].

The second advisor turned out to be Czesław Miłosz, who wrote about Mickiewicz's drama in his 1977 collection *The Land of Ulro: The reason for the play's jolting effect, whether read in private or seen in performance, must be sought through introspection. Its paramount theme, man in the face of misfortune, is one that compels a personal response*<sup>48</sup>. It may well be that none of the previous adapters of *Forefathers' Eve* was more entitled to following that suggestion than Tadeusz Konwicki. He followed his own path *through introspection* not only as the reader of the play, but also as the author of a film based upon it. He filtered *Forefathers' Eve* through his own self, in order to re-tell the drama as if in his own voice, using poetics all his own. As early as summer 1987, he announced: *The film will be focused on Mickiewicz. The form that will be used is one I feel attached to and which I always (perhaps subconsciously) resort to. And so: a spiritual journey to a native land. It will be Mickiewicz's return – as a spirit or simply as a man trying to fall asleep in Paris – to Lithuania*<sup>49</sup>. Konwicki explained repeatedly that this favorite poetics of his had strongly personal, imaginative roots. *For a long time, I developed a habit, which became particularly*



*Lava*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1989)



*Lava*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1989)

*persistent during the martial law era: when I wanted to take a break, pause, experience light pleasure, ease my mind for a second – I traveled in my mind from Vilnius, through the Subocz street, through Markucie, right up to Vilnius Colony. My being there was at times so intense, I might have given a scare to some natives, who would run as soon as they saw me* <sup>50</sup>. The spectacle of Mickiewicz's sleeplessness was, in fact, a creative reworking of nightly fits of sleeplessness that plagued Konwicki himself. The identification went so far that the director even confessed the following: *As I was working on the shooting script for "Forefathers' Eve", I shaped and formed the text as if it was my own. In fact, after a while, I really felt as if it was me who had written those poems* <sup>51</sup>. By equating himself with the author – as Maria Janion noted – Konwicki solved the key problem of the interpretation of the work; the source of the story told in *Lava* became the memory of a single character <sup>52</sup>.

Still, even the framing device of the film suggests just how complicated that character is and how ambiguous is the time-space continuum the viewer is faced with when watching the film. The movie opens with a vast panorama of Vilnius, accompanied by the natural sounds of bells and thunderstorm; after few moments the viewer realizes that the point of view is that of an "old Poet" (Gustaw Holoubek), standing on the Trzykrzyska mountain in silence, clad in a characteristic, ancient-looking garment – as the scripts states, *in a dark cloak, with a cape resting on his shoulders* <sup>53</sup> – which he will remain wearing for the rest of the film. In the very next shot the Poet appears against a new background – he walks through the parlor and stops on the stairs of an old, decrepit manor, after which he starts his monologue, addressing the viewer directly. The monologue is the first paragraph of Part III of *Forefathers' Eve*, and begins with: *For over half a century now, Poland is on one hand the subject of constant, ceaseless and merciless cruelty of the tyrants, and on another the hub of boundless sacrifice by its people, as well as of resilience so fierce, one would be hard-pressed to find its equivalent in anything but in the persecution of early Christians* <sup>54</sup>. The monologue of the Poet is accompanied by two images that will prove to be the film's leitmotifs: that of a rider galloping on a horse through the forest (Jan Nowicki plays a double role: the Ghost of the wicked landowner in the cemetery scene, as well as Belzebub, who intervenes a couple of times, most prominently when he finishes Konrad's Great Improvisation by a blasphemous suggestion that God is in fact the Devil, or *Tsar*), and that of an eagle rising in its nest at sundown. As soon as Holoubek finishes his opening recitation, the view of Vilnius is replaced with yet another panorama – that of contemporary Warsaw, with the characteristic silhouette of the Stalin-donated Palace of Culture and Sciences. It is towards that landscape that the female Angel (Grażyna Szapołowska) goes towards, clad in white garment with a red sash, which naturally recalls the national colors of Poland. Her first appearance is accompanied by Zygmunt Konieczny's main musical theme: separated, rhythmical sounds precede the choir, singing lyrics easy to recognize as the upcoming Vision of Priest Piotr: *All to the North! As rivers they do flow. Lord! It is the offspring of ours...*, etc. These very sounds accompany the image of the Angel – first by herself and then amongst the contemporary Warsaw crowd, after which we see her in the decrepit manor (later identified as the *house of the late mother* by Gustaw-Poet in a conversation he has with the Priest). The rest of the title sequence shows assorted images of people

crowding the various cemeteries to honor their dead: we see a Jewish cemetery, a Muslim one, and the the Catholic cemetery of Powązki in Warsaw. After the last title of the opening credits disappears, Poet-Holoubek stands in the Gate of Dawn, kneels before it and it is from this image that the story proper emerges.

This initial sequence, apart from introducing the main character and the chief recurring motifs of the film, also establishes two parallels, which are key to the viewing experience *Lava* attempts to trigger. The first is temporal in nature. The opening Mickiewicz line (*For over half a century now, Poland...*) obviously refers to the period between the first partition of Poland (1772) and the time the Dresden installment of *Forefathers' Eve* was written in 1832. But since Konwicki's film opened in 1989, this opening sentence written by Mickiewicz applies in its entirety and without alteration (just like in *The Issa Valley*, all quotations from the source work are unaltered) to Poland's contemporary situation. It was exactly 50 years since the defeat of September 1939 [and the beginning of World War Two, ending in Soviet domination of Poland]. The second parallel has to do with space: the central compositional principle of Konwicki's work, starting with *Ascention* (*Wniebowstąpienie*, 1967) and even with the novel *From the City Under Siege* (*Z obłożonego miasta*) written 11 years prior, is the constant tension between the recreated memory-landscape of the Vilnian valley of childhood and the landscape of Warsaw, which is experienced in the present time by the author who actually lives there. It is the Palace of Culture that has been fulfilling a special function in that landscape for years: on one hand, it is a living symbol of forced servitude [since it was Stalin who donated it], on the other, as an everyday view from the window, it makes the cityscape familiar<sup>55</sup>. The opening sequence, just like in *The Issa Valley*, triggers a triple narrative perspective: it opens the story of Mickiewicz revisiting the land of his childhood; introduces the recognizable world of Konwicki's films; and opens the time-space of myth having to do with the very nature of national perseverance, placed midway between the sense of loss and the hope of restitution.

The second element of the framing device – the film's finale – brings all the aforementioned issues to their logical conclusion. Konieczny's theme first appears with the arrival of the Angel – it is then heard during the scene of the end of the ritual, which closes the film as it closed Part III of *Forefathers' Eve*: it is dawning, the birds sing and – following the very image we recall from the beginning of the film, of Belzebub-Wicked Lord on a horse – Guślarz (Maja Komorowska, in a feat of cross-gender casting) follows the Woman's wish and conjures up her lover's spirit: *Amongst thick stormy billows / A pack of carts follows. / All head to the Northern night, / Horses gallop with all might. / See the one at the front*<sup>56</sup>. But in *Lava* it is no longer mere words: the image becomes real before our very eyes. In a snowy landscape, supervised by soldiers, we see Konrad (Artur Żmijewski) as he is driven north by one of the carts, a bloody wound on his chest. Immediately after that there is an unexpected turn: the passenger of yet another North- (and Siberia-) bound cart is the Poet-Holoubek. He had to enter it by his own volition, since his journey takes place solely in his imagination. This imagined vision of going away – symmetrical with the image of the Poet kneeling in the Gate of Dawn and accompanied by the same sound – closes the “Polish night of miracles” retold in *Lava*<sup>57</sup>.

It is afterwards that the finale comes, accompanied by the choir we already heard, singing the fragments of the Vision of Priest Piotr. Poet-Holoubek is again

standing in front of the same decrepit manor and recites the final passages of the introduction to the Part II of *Forefathers' Eve* (*Who knows this history well, will confirm its author's testimony*, etc.), but his monologue is juxtaposed with a different set of images than we saw in the opening. First comes a self-reflexive image, shot at the gate of the Feature and Documentary Film Studio (WFDiF) on Chelmska Street in Warsaw, where some of the interior scenes were made – we see the crew of *Lava* as they leave the studio after a day's work. Gustaw Holoubek says goodbye to Maja Komorowska, we catch a glimpse of Artur Żmijewski, Tadeusz Konwicki tips his hat to Teresa Budzisz-Krzyżanowska, who just played the part of Mrs. Rolison. The next shot celebrates communal joy: we see glimpses of the Holy Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II at the altar built next to the Palace of Culture. The final words by Mickiewicz are accompanied by another panorama of Vilnius, capped by a semi-close-up of Poet-Holoubek looking at it. In the very last image of the film, the eagle flies out of its nest, this time greeted by a rising sun.

This finale completes all three narrative perspectives of the film and joins them into a single one. The first is the autobiographical tale recounted from the point of view of the Poet – “old Mickiewicz”, who in his sleeplessness makes his nightly trek through Vilnius<sup>58</sup>. However, it is Tadeusz Konwicki who *formed and shaped the text of “Forefathers' Eve” as his own*, which is reminded to us by the shots of the crew leaving the studio. *Lava* is at a biographical tale, built by the adapter with all the parts of Mickiewicz's play, except (as often is the case in various productions) the scene including Ewa in *a country house near Lviv*. It is within this mixed tape of sorts that the story, developed from the consciousness of the Poet kneeling at the Gate of Dawn, begins with Part I, or *Forefathers – The Spectacle* (with the young Gustaw, played by Artur Żmijewski, still not knowing Maryla, but *feeling at all times that some eyes see his tears*), after which it moves on to Part II – the cemetery ritual shared by the *choir of peasants* and the students of Vilnius, placed squarely in *Poet's memory* – which incorporates the scene in the Priest's house, itself being a condensed version of the Part IV of *Forefathers' Eve* and closing with the Poet's recitation of two first stanzas of *Ghost* – the opening segment of Mickiewicz's entire source poetic drama. After that we hear the Virgin's monologue (the Virgin is here identified as [Mickiewicz's famous object of affection] Maryla) taken from Part I, followed by a staging of Part III of *Forefathers' Eve*, beginning in the cell of Gustaw-Konrad, with a significant change in order of scenes: after the Prologue we witness Senator's Dream (scene VI of the play). What follows next is scene I (at the convent cell), which incorporates the Warsaw Salon (scene VII) almost without any change, and then morphs into Great Improvisation (scene II). After that, in chronological order, we see scene III and V (featuring Priest Piotr), VIII (Senator's Ball) and IX (the end of *The Night of the Forefathers*).

The entire story is presented in the film as imaginary one; scenes gradually emerge from the imagination or the memory of the Poet, during his night and early morning stroll through vacant streets of Vilnius. The logic of the narrative is dictated by subsequent appearances of the Poet, usually announced by the rhythmical motifs of Koneczny's music – none of those appearances leave the structure of the narrative intact. For example, when in the middle of the cemetery conjuring of the ghost of the Girl (Maryla) we see the Poet as he traverses the giant square in front of the basilica, it means that the Poet is headed towards the cemetery, where some-



*Lava*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1989)

thing exceptional is taking place. Indeed, later in the cemetery scene we witness the appearance of the silent Ghost of Gustaw, with a bloody wound on his chest. A moment later the Ghost disappears, together with all the participants of the scene; after all it was taking place – just like all the others – inside the Poet’s imagination. It is him who is now standing by himself at the cemetery and recites the beginning of *Ghost*, which explains his status: *The dead comes back to the land of youth / Searching for the face of his beloved* <sup>59</sup>.

When he walks through the courtyard of the convent, and after he freely enters Gustaw-Konrad’s cell to comfort the prisoner, who is in fact his younger self – it is chiefly to offer him his famous message from the Prologue to Part III of *Forefathers’ Eve*, directed at the Ghost and closing with the words: *All of you people could, while alone and imprisoned, / By means of thought and faith raze and erect thrones of power* <sup>60</sup>. When, moments later, he appears in the corridor of the Royal Castle in Warsaw (as we know, Mickiewicz never visited that city), he interrupts the Lithuanian actor Arunas Smailis’ rendition of a monologue he himself authored, by interjecting a fragment on the nature of dreams, which in the play’s Prologue is spoken by Gustaw and closes with the words: *I cannot rest, my dreams scare and deceive me, / They are my true toil!* <sup>61</sup>. The high point of this string of interventions is of course the Poet’s participation in the Great Improvisation: as the monologue approaches and Konrad starts to circle around his cell nervously, we see the Poet as he approaches the convent. His reflection in the window of the cell appears suddenly, as soon as Konrad starts his Improvisation. After mere ten verses, Konrad disappears. From the words *Me, the master!* onwards, for the remaining twelve and a half minutes, it is Holoubek who delivers the lines (a switch which the screenplay explains as necessary for credibility reason: *It is then that the improvisation is picked up by the Poet, wearing his customary cloak with a cape resting on his shoulders. His hair has been gray for a while. A net of wrinkles around the eyes. Only a man like that can argue with God himself*<sup>62</sup>). One particularly sophisticated bit of the same series is interjected into the Senator’s Ball sequence. The Poet, whom we have just seen as he traversed the cemetery, takes over the text of Scene



*Lava*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1989)

III (the conversation with Priest Piotr), which consists of Konrad's dreamy vision, not only imagining but in fact making Rollison jump off the window to his death.

Of course, it does not suffice to say that the Poet is "the ghost of Mickiewicz", or merely *an old Mickiewicz, travelling in his imagination from Paris to the city of his youth*<sup>63</sup>. It is likely that this aspect of the character may remain in the viewer's consciousness at all times, but the narrative situation from the very start (from the first panorama of Vilnius) suggests a much wider, deeply contemporary status of the character. In his review of *Lava*, Andrzej Werner remarked: *When Konrad-Holoubek is walking through the streets of Vilnius and stands on the hill overlooking the city, one might think that here is a man who is already familiar the approaching century and a half of history of this particular corner of Europe*<sup>64</sup>. The character itself is a sum of the tradition – parts of which is the unusual costume it wears<sup>65</sup>, the mock-Modernist notion of "artist as such" and the tremendous power it owes to Gustaw Holoubek himself. It is not merely a matter of his masterly acting – even though it is indeed hard to imagine a better Great Improvisation<sup>66</sup>, not only because the actor restored many fragments excised in the script itself. Tadeusz Konwicki said that he immediately recognized that the actor was doing that as he spoke his lines, but since he saw how masterly was Holoubek's delivery, he did not let his assistant interrupt him<sup>67</sup>. What is crucial, is the actor's own memory of his turn as Gustaw-Konrad in the legendary [politically inflammatory] production [of *Forefathers' Eve*] by Kazimierz Dejmek in 1967. Even though for most viewers this acting turn was only a part of the legend (if, in fact, they knew about it at all), still the legend itself reminds that a theater production can in fact influence history.

At the same time, as we noted before, the Poet represents the film's author – Tadeusz Konwicki – and those fond of his novels will read the character as yet another incarnation of Konwicki's perennial hero (a reading that is reinforced by such extra-textual details as "a table in Czytelnik café", reminding us of Konwicki and Holoubek's real-life friendship). It is Konwicki, after all, who is returning – in this film and through this film – to the land of his youth (in fact, it was during the 1988 shoot that he visited most of those places for the first time since 1956, which was



*The Issa Valley*, dir. Tadeusz Konwicki (1982)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

made possible by the political situation – three years before, when Andrzej Wajda was making *Chronicle of Love Affairs*, he could not even dream of shooting in Vilnius). Even independently of his favorite poetics, even apart from his biography, thanks to the unique positioning of the director, the viewer feels constantly in touch with Konwicki the author. To latch onto the example of *Great Improvisation*, one can repeat the words of Zbigniew Majchrowski: *Holoubek is interpreting the monologue, Konwicki is putting together a film essay* <sup>68</sup>. Indeed, one gets that double feeling as one watches the *Great Improvisation* in *Lava*: one listens to the text and thus gets in touch with the Author-Actor, who by means of perfect delivery introduces all the meanings discussed before, naturally interposed onto the creative potential of the man who is the subject to Mickiewicz's poem; but one also looks at the image and thinks of the commentary that is being added by means of twenty five intercuts, all placed by the Artist-Author, who directs our reading towards images emerging from the collective memory. To quote Majchrowski once more: *The Improvisation, as seen by Konwicki, is (...) torn between an idyll and an apocalypse, between the love meeting of Gustav and Maryla and the Warsaw Uprising, between Tuhanowicze [in Kresy] and Katyń* <sup>69</sup>.

But, as I already mentioned apart from those two interposed narrative perspectives, originating – to put it briefly – from Mickiewicz and from Konwicki respectively, there is a third perspective, as well. It is triggered by the human crowd, the true “lava” that the title stresses, by alluding to the famous speech of Wysocki at

the end of the Warsaw Salon scene and speaking of the social “depth”; the true nature of Poles that is impossible to cool down. In the framing device of the film the crowd is contemporary – anonymous in the street scene, partly recognizable in the scenes of the crew leaving the film studio, or in the triumphant images of the papal mass. This human crowd turns out to be a logical and chronological continuation of other crowds depicted repeatedly in various parts of the film. It is not only the specific communities that we see – that of students’ rebels or salon-dwelling conformists – in the course of the aforementioned double narration. It is the anonymous crowd, appearing in the images of the film as if by accident, independently of the author’s intention, as in the mock-TV reportage scene of Sobolewski’s Tale (acted out by Piotr Fronczewski), or in the recurring images of people imprisoned for unspoken trespasses, dragged down the street, as well as those of passive bystanders – both independent of the Poet’s tale (since they are not to be found in the play) and external to the director’s narrative (even though – in global view – they do come from Konwicki, of course).

In the light of the entire film the community we speak of is that of victors – captured in this brief moment when two centuries worth of enslavement finally found a palpable finish. This is, after all, the meaning of Poet-Holoubek’s gesture, who by his own volition joins his former self – Konrad – when the latter is sent to Siberia. It was worth to rebel! The choice, made in hindsight, would have been the same. That is why the eagle flying up in the end is finally the herald of freedom.

Those images are not there to tickle the community’s pride, though. The images of Polish crowd in *Lava* are the film’s reflections of the same community of which one researcher of the rituals of Polish Romantic theater writes as the true hero of Forefathers. This crowd – says Michał Masłowski – is a *synecdoche of a cultural community*<sup>70</sup>, designed to *inject into the collective memory the wisdom, which is no longer merely sentientious*<sup>71</sup>. The meaning of the ritual, serving the memory of the political martyrdom of Poles, lies in understanding the deep meaning of contemporary era itself. *It is no longer only about the community accepting the past individual fates according to external criteria, but about the communal incorporation of contemporary events, which is usually guaranteed by authoritarian institutions – the government, the parties, the church. It is all about making the society ideologically autonomous from the existing institutions. It is about creating a social bond outside of political or religious establishments – not against them, but in a sense by a movement parallel to them, overtaking their competences and realizing their missions through the mechanisms of life of culture itself*<sup>72</sup>.

Here, the community is of course understood in broader terms than the Kresovian “little motherland”, which Konwicki saw himself as the spokesman for when he took on the two film adaptations we discussed. It is the community of Polish people, understood as a representation – at the risk of pathos – mankind itself. Starting out by telling the story of the first, Konwicki addresses the second, in order to speak in fact of the third.

TADEUSZ LUBELSKI

Translated by MICHAŁ OLESZCZYK

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- <sup>1</sup> *Trzy glosy o problemach adaptacji filmowej. Wypowiedź Tadeusza Konwickiego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1960, no. 4, pp. 24-28.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>5</sup> S. Nowicki (S. Beres), *Pół wieku czyścica. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, London 1986, p. 110.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>7</sup> See: ibidem, pp. 90-91.
- <sup>8</sup> See: ibidem, pp. 103-104; T. Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco*, interviewed by Katarzyna Bielas and Jacek Szczerba, Kraków 2001, p. 142.
- <sup>9</sup> T. Konwicki, *Wschody i zachody księżycy*, Warszawa 1982, p. 17. Compare English edition: idem, *Moonrise, Moonset*, transl. R. Lourie, New York 1987.
- <sup>10</sup> T. Konwicki, *Jak kręciłem "Lawę"?*, in: *Magia kina*, ed. J. Wróblewski, Warszawa 1995, p. 17.
- <sup>11</sup> A. Helman, *Adaptacje filmowe dzieł literackich jako świadectwa lektury tekstu*, "Kino" 1985, no. 4; see: A. Helman, *Twórcza zdrada. Filmowe adaptacje literatury*, Poznań 1998, p. 12.
- <sup>12</sup> T. Konwicki, *Mickiewiczowie młodzi*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 26-27.11.2005, p. 15.
- <sup>13</sup> E. Czarnecka (R. Gorczyńska), *Podróżny świata. Rozmowy z Czesławem Miłoszem*, Warszawa 1984, p. 106.
- <sup>14</sup> *Zacząć na nowo. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawia T. Lubelski*, in: *Debiuty polskiego kina*, ed. M. Hendrykowski, Konin 1998, p. 88.
- <sup>15</sup> T. Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco*, op. cit., p. 167.
- <sup>16</sup> M. Janion, *Tam gdzie rojsty*, "Twórczość" 1983, no. 4, pp. 93-110; quotation from p. 99.
- <sup>17</sup> T. Konwicki, *KOMPLEKS POLSKI*, second (official) edition, Warszawa 1990, p. 79. (The writer himself suggested an upper-case spelling of the title, thus freeing himself from the dilemma if the word "POLSKI" should serve as a noun or an adjective). Compare English edition: idem, *The Polish Complex*, transl. R. Lourie, Normal 1998.
- <sup>18</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *Szukanie ojczyzny*, Kraków 1992, p. 183.
- <sup>19</sup> See: J. Kolbuszewski, *Kresy*, Wrocław 2002, p. 49, 54.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>21</sup> T. Chrzanowski, *Kresy czyli obszary tęsknot*, Kraków 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> Cz. Miłosz, op. cit., p. 30. In the same book (p. 44) Miłosz cautiously proposes that the mythologizing of the pagan Lithuania by the Poles is a sign of our (i.e. Polish) dislike of the clergy.
- <sup>23</sup> Quoted in: J. Kolbuszewski, op. cit. p. 208.
- <sup>24</sup> M. Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna. Fantazmaty literatury*, Kraków 2006, pp. 170-171.
- <sup>25</sup> D. Beauvois, *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793-1914*, transl. K. Rutkowski, Lublin 2005.
- <sup>26</sup> B. Bakula, *Kolonialne i postkolonialne aspekty polskiego dyskursu kresoznawczego (zarys problematyki)*, "Teksty Drugie" 2006, no. 6, pp. 11-33. Quotation from p. 13.
- <sup>27</sup> T. Konwicki, *KOMPLEKS POLSKI*, op. cit., p. 80.
- <sup>28</sup> See endnote 2.
- <sup>29</sup> T. Konwicki, *Wschody i zachody księżycy*, op. cit., p. 52. In the unofficial edition by Wydawnictwo Krąg press, passages on making of the film are also to be found on pages 17-18, 50-52, 77-78, 101, 116-117, 174.
- <sup>30</sup> Miłosz himself, in a series of interviews conducted by Renata Gorczyńska in late 1970s and early 1980s, denied the autobiographical character of *The Issa Valley*, classifying it as a fairy tale of sorts; see: E. Czarnecka, *Podróżny świata*, op. cit., pp. 109-110. Several years later it was in a different sense that he mentioned the fairy tale status – this time pointing to the book's denial of harsh realities: *When I think about the typhus epidemic in our district and the funerals throughout that winter of 1919 (if I remember correctly)*, "The Issa Valley" – even though it is a novel and not a documentary – acquires the coloration of a fairy tale. And I am ready to put all literature on trial for inaccuracy. Cz. Miłosz, *A Year of the Hunter*, transl. M. G. Levine, New York 1994, p. 256 (compare Polish edition: idem, *Rok myśliwego*, Paris 1990, p. 261).
- <sup>31</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *The Issa Valley: A Novel*, transl. L. Iribarne, New York 2000, pp. 37, 110 (compare Polish edition: idem, *Dolina Issy*, Kraków 1981, p. 35, 109).
- <sup>32</sup> See endnote 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *W mojej ojczyźnie*, in: idem, *Wiersze*, vol. 1, Kraków 2001, p. 142.
- <sup>34</sup> Konwicki himself spoke ironically on the subject: *Miłosz reveals a complex every time someone calls the book autobiographical. He denies it everywhere. There are simply authors who are ashamed that they are writing "from life", as it were*. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 105.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>36</sup> Similar conclusions were reached by other authors, who in recent years analyzed his films

- as his personal statements. Barbara Głębička-Giza proved that the idea behind the adaptation is not a portrait of the Issa Valley itself, but that of an artist who comes from over there. The film is an impression of sorts, dictated by the memory of the place; an impression that kept the perceptions and emotions caused by the particular nature of the place, but also by the longing one feels to come back to it. B. Głębička-Giza, "Dolina Issy", "Lawa" i "Kronika wypadków miłosnych". *O autorskiej twórczości Tadeusza Konwickiego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2003, no. 44, p. 199. Natasza Korczarowska, on the other hand, maintains that Konwicki's film bears a striking formal resemblance to an essay. *The supreme agent, who organizes the structure of the film text has to be sought outside of its diegetic plane*. N. Korczarowska, *Ojczyzny prywatne. Mitologia przestrzeni prywatności w filmach Tadeusza Konwickiego, Jana Jakuba Koloskiego, Andrzeja Kondratiuka*, Kraków 2007, p. 129.
- <sup>37</sup> It was a conscious move on part of the director; see: S. Nowicki, op. cit., p.108.
- <sup>38</sup> I wrote more extensively on the motif of a journey as a metaphor for creative work in Konwicki's oeuvre in my book: T. Lubelski, *Poetyka twórczości i filmów Tadeusza Konwickiego (na podstawie analiz utworów z lat 1947-1965)*, Wrocław 1984.
- <sup>39</sup> T. Konwicki, *Wschody i zachody księżycy*, op. cit., p. 52; see the entire passage on pages 50-52.
- <sup>40</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *The Issa Valley: A Novel*, op. cit., p. 154 (compare Polish edition: idem, *Dolina Issy*, op. cit., p. 154-155).
- <sup>41</sup> See: T. Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco*, op. cit., pp. 143-144.
- <sup>42</sup> It is worth mentioning that the sentence on Balthazar's life is spoken in the film in the voice of Włodzimierz Boruński and acquires additional meaning in the light of the materials recently discovered by the authors of the book on life choices of Polish intellectuals after the war. Boruński was one of the people interrogating Konwicki at the gathering of the Association of Polish Writers, where he was accepted to the Communist Party. It was the same gathering that reappears later as a recurring nightmare of the main character of *A Dreambook for Our Time*. It was Boruński who asked the question about Konwicki's participation in anti-Soviet partisans troops: *Did you participate in the assault and did you shoot yourself?* A. Bikont, J. zczęsna, *Lawina i kamienie. Pisarze wobec komunizmu*, Warszawa 2006, p. 88.
- <sup>43</sup> Konwicki himself said that the contemporary layer of the film can be also read as an extension of sorts to the novel itself; its epilog, in which we see the children and grandchildren of the Issa Valley natives. See: *Wileńszczyzna moich snów. Z T. Konwickim o ekranizacji "Doliny Issy"* rozm. B. Zagroba, "Film" 1981, no. 39.
- <sup>44</sup> The fragments of Czesław Miłosz's poems the translator was able to locate in English translation are quoted from: Cz. Miłosz, *New and Collected Poems 1931-2001*, New York 2003.
- <sup>45</sup> T. Lubelski, *Trzy rzeki. O filmie "Dolina Issy"*, "Film" 1981, no. 48.
- <sup>46</sup> The conflict between literary historians and theatre studies academics in how to properly understand Mickiewicz's drama is thoroughly accounted for by Leszek Kolankiewicz in his fundamental anthropological study: *Dziady. Teatr święta zmarłych*, Gdańsk 1999, especially pp. 229-250.
- <sup>47</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *O poemacie "Dziady"*, in: idem, *Dziela, Tom. V: Pisma prozą. Część I*, Warszawa 1952, pp. 276-277.
- <sup>48</sup> Cz. Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro*, transl. L. Iribarne, New York 2000, p. 118 (compare Polish edition: idem, *Ziemia Ulro*, Kraków 2000, p. 147).
- <sup>49</sup> *W szponach romantyzmu*, Tadeusz Konwicki interviewed by Elżbieta Sawicka, "Odra" 1988, no. 1, p. 27.
- <sup>50</sup> *To my jesteśmy "Czterdzieści i cztery"*. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawia Tadeusz Lubelski, "Kino" 1999, no. 4, p. 10.
- <sup>51</sup> T. Konwicki, *Jak kręciłem "Lawę"*, op. cit., p.19.
- <sup>52</sup> *Using the famous, "open" structure of "Forefathers' Eve", Konwicki has weaved his own story: as non-linear, simultaneous, multi-layered as life and memory themselves. In this way he avoided the old literary dilemma of how to connect Part IV of the poem to its Part III. (...) The whole is shaped by the unity of a single life*. M. Janion, *Krwotok lawy*, in: eadem, *Projekt krytyki fantazmatycznej*, Warszawa 1991, pp. 172-173.
- <sup>53</sup> *Lawa. Fragmenty "Dziadów" Adama Mickiewicza*. A screenplay by Tadeusz Konwicki, May 1987, p. 1, Polish Film Archive.
- <sup>54</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Dziady. Poema*, in: idem, *Dziela, Tom III: Utwory dramatyczne*, Warszawa 1949, p. 121. The same text is repeated on the film's soundtrack. Compare English edition: idem, *Dziady (Forefathers' Eve): Dresden text*, transl. C. S. Kraszewski, Lehman 2000.
- <sup>55</sup> The operation of ridding the power that be of its symbol, performed by Konwicki upon the

- icon of the Palace of Culture* in Warsaw, was described by Tadeusz Sobolewski in his essay *Balkon Konwickiego*, in: idem, *Dziecko Peereleu*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 28-29.
- <sup>56</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Dziady. Poema*, op. cit., p. 261; also quoted on the film's soundtrack.
- <sup>57</sup> The formulation is by Tadeusz Konwicki, who commented upon his film as of a story of Mickiewicz: *He comes there* [to the still-Soviet Vilnius of 1988 – T. L.] and *recreates what is so characteristic of our art: a Polish night of wonders. He prepares this little, innocuous episode of a student's pact, which will later grow throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until the very hecatomb of the Warsaw Uprising*. See: *Zacząć na nowo. Z Tadeuszem Konwickim rozmawia T. Lubelski*, op. cit., p. 90.
- <sup>58</sup> Michał Masłowski went as far as remarking that one of customary answers to the question of who is the main character of *Forefathers' Eve* – no matter how insufficient – is: *The main character is the poet himself, struggling with growing up in matters of love, patriotism and religion...* See: M. Masłowski, *Kto jest bohaterem "Dziadów"?* in: *"Dziady" Adama Mickiewicza. Poemat, adaptacje, tradycje*, ed. B. Dopart, Kraków 1999, p. 59. The possibility of a similar reading of Konwicki's film was discussed by Przemysław Kaniecki in his article *"Lawa" Tadeusza Konwickiego jako film o Mickiewiczu na podstawie "Dziadów"*, included in: *Biografistyka filmowa. Ekranowe interpretacje losów i faktów*, ed. T. Szczepański, S. Kołos, Toruń 2007.
- <sup>59</sup> A. Mickiewicz, *Dziady. Poema*, op. cit., p. 7.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibidem, p. 133; also on the film's soundtrack.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibidem, p. 130.
- <sup>62</sup> *Lawa*, Screenplay by Tadeusz Konwicki, op. cit., p. 68.
- <sup>63</sup> See endnote 49.
- <sup>64</sup> A. Werner, *Dzieje ognia*, "Kino" 1989, no. 12, p. 4.
- <sup>65</sup> Zbigniew Majchrowski, in his excellent book on the theatrical history of the Great Improvisation, reminded that Konrad wore his black cloak as early as in the 1901 production of *Forefathers' Eve*, directed by Stanisław Wyspiański. See: Z. Majchrowski, *Cela Konrada. Powracając do Mickiewicza*, Gdańsk 1999, p. 193.
- <sup>66</sup> *The finished work is something unique in the history of Polish culture; something one could listen to day in and day out*, wrote Maria Janion, *Krwotok lawy*, op. cit., p. 173.
- <sup>67</sup> Incidentally, Holoubek's version of Improvisation was shot not only in a single continuous shot, but also required no repeated takes. See: T. Konwicki, *Pamiętam, że było gorąco*, op. cit., p. 170.
- <sup>68</sup> Z. Majchrowski, *Cela Konrada*, op. cit., p. 198.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibidem, p. 200.
- <sup>70</sup> M. Masłowski, *Gest, symbol i rytuały polskiego teatru romantycznego*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 79, 81.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibidem.

# War beading up into a red dot

Autobiographical discourse in Andrzej Żuławski's  
*The Third Part of the Night*

MONIKA MASZEWSKA-ŁUPINIAK

## **Autobiographism in the fictional narration of *The Third Part of the Night***

In the opening words of her essay *Autobiografizm dzisiaj (Autobiographism today)*, Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska writes: *In recent decades, the invasion of autobiographism – in its different forms – into writing and mass media has become an omnipresent fact. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to try to pinpoint significant theoretical problems relevant to this phenomenon in writing (...)*<sup>1</sup>. The present paper does not aim to investigate the causes of this expansion of the autobiographical element or the fashion for autobiographism, as these problems have been already sufficiently described by theoreticians representing different research perspectives. Within the broadly understood context of autobiographical discourse, I am interested in its one selected aspect, namely film autobiographism as a particular communicative attitude of the film author, and the viewer's behaviours projected by this attitude. I would like to discuss this problem using the example of Andrzej Żuławski's film *The Third Part of the Night* (original Polish title: *Trzecia część nocy*).

*The Third Part of the Night* was Żuławski's first fictional film. It was inspired by the director's dramatic childhood memories of the second world war. The film seems to be a perfect embodiment of the poetics of the "autobiographical event", which was described by Tadeusz Lubelski as a form of autobiographical film: *It refers to a group of films which reconstruct an event or a limited sequence of events from the author's biography. At times, this autobiographical provenance is suggested in the film text, but sometimes it also happens that it can be learnt about only from the social text of the biography itself. Actually, the label "reconstruction" is an exaggeration; usually, in such films the plot is created from a mixture of factual and fictional events. What gets "reconstructed", or perhaps rather "fictionalised" especially often are events from childhood and early young age; they make the most favoured goal of autobiographical wanderings, particularly for debut artists*<sup>2</sup>.

As a representation of a piece of family history, Żuławski's film fits in the autobiographical discourse, and as a text about the Holocaust, it creates a universal message. This binary opposition inscribed in the structure of the film invites reflection on the relationship between the work and its viewer, or, to be more precise, between the ethical determinants of this relationship. Two overlapping ideas con-

cerning the reception of this film come into play: it can be read as a text about the Holocaust or as an autobiographical message. Both approaches need to take into consideration the author's intended attitude of provocation, a kind of a challenge to the viewers, who get involved in the very process of message creation: in *The Third Part of the Night*, the fragments of family biography project a hidden, transformed and phantasmatic autobiographism, deeply ingrained in the fictive tissue, in the background of the presented world.

*I would never make a film about myself*, Żuławski claims, *for several reasons, including ethical ones. I believe that this shouldn't be done. And yet on the other hand, I'm also very reluctant, actually more so in literature than in film, towards telling about things that you know nothing about, that you're not familiar with*<sup>3</sup>. The director admits that his is a generation marked by war, that traumatic experiences and memories connected with the wartime past have shaped his identity: *After all, we've been raised on the stuff of war; although we haven't experienced it directly, we stem from it as we are*<sup>4</sup>. Images and scenes remembered from his childhood in the time of the Holocaust recur throughout Żuławski's output, both literary and cinematic: *These are such memories that until sixteen I couldn't sleep without the light on. My sister died on our hands from hunger and cold. Half the family were killed at Auschwitz, the other half in Siberia. Three of us made it: my parents and I. My first film, "The Third Part of the Night", was a tribute to them*<sup>5</sup>. In his statements, Żuławski underscores that *The Third Part of the Night* is a tribute paid to the war generation of fathers, *to what they had been, as intelligent educated young men from good families, and to what they must have experienced to turn into the persons that I later knew*<sup>6</sup>. In another interview, he adds: *When talking to my father and other people who survived the occupation – and their life adventure in it, in such a drastic, complicated moment – I wanted to learn about the questions that they were asking themselves, to know which of these they considered fundamental. (...) for me, an extremely important issue is how to preserve one's self from the moment of such disaster, what to draw from it in order to defend the fundamental truth or fundamental principle of one's life*<sup>7</sup>. The autobiographical context of the film can be complemented with the director's conclusion: *we turn to the fate of our fathers because for us they are a condensation of sorts, a drop of that which makes fate as such, existence as such, because this something nearest to us, and the most visible*<sup>8</sup>.

The script of *The Third Part of the Night* was based on the novella *Minuta milczenia* (*A minute of silence*) by the film director's father, writer Miroslaw Żuławski. *I wanted to make this film as a parable about that stratum of intellectuals that my parents represented. But also in order to tell about that historical, political and human paradox: bringing children into the world in the year 1940. My father was in the Home Army, he was in charge of underground press in Lviv; also my mother was a resistance soldier. They met, they conceived two children; I was more lucky, because I was stronger; my sister lived only several months. She died of hunger and cold. My father found a job at an institute where anti-typhus vaccine was produced. I asked him to write out the theme of lice feeding (with oneself) and dissecting. The vaccine was made out of lice guts from lice feeding on human body, human blood. I reworked father's text, weaving in the drama of the doubleness of characters*<sup>9</sup>. This is further developed elsewhere: *Since childhood, I had been absolutely*

*certain that my father's work at Rudolf Weigl's Institute in Lviv, where he was a feeder of typhus-infected lice, was the most normal thing on earth. It was only with the beginning of my contact with the world of film, cinema, that I realised that this had not been the most normal thing on earth but the most abnormal, arresting, the most striking thing. (...) this condensation, this crystallisation, such beading up of war into a red dot – as that was how it appeared in my mind – is something totally priceless. It mustn't slip into oblivion. This is something that I know, and others don't. Others won't make it into anything, so I have to show it. It was an absolute certainty, conviction. It rested on the fact that this is a family history, and that I'm alive thanks to him doing it. (...) this was something obvious on the one hand, and on other it proved totally arresting, surreal, bizarre, and completely different from everything else that has been said on the subject* <sup>10</sup>.

In *Minuta milczenia*, Mirosław Żuławski described everything that used to take place at Weigl's Institute in minute detail, basing not only on his memories, but also on entries from a journal which he had regularly kept at that time <sup>11</sup>. *This almost para-documentary layer of the story determined the poetics of the film: It was in appreciation of the advantage of a documentary that I chose for my film a metaphorical, sign-based form* <sup>12</sup>, stated the director. In Żuławski's film, the war condensing into a red dot is not only a metaphor, functioning like the Barthesian *punctum*, but also an autobiographical trope, which enables viewers to wander in the anamorphic labyrinth of the Żuławskis' family history. The labyrinthine image of the world in *The Third Part of the Night* is constructed on two levels. The localising and constitutive level consists in specific places of action, events and characters. Under this outer layer, there is the inner tissue of film narrative, composed of wartime treasures from the film author's archive of memory. The author of the story concludes an autobiographical pact with his viewers, and the manner in which this is done gives rise to the form of film message. Holocaust experiences are shaped by, or rather indirectly reconstructed from, shreds of childhood memories, accounts of adults, and historical knowledge. Instead of a first-person narrator, typically used in autobiography, an omniscient narrator guides us through the past; in this way, the autobiographical element of the narrative at the same time projects its universal dimension, transforming a story of the wartime generation of fathers into a parable of "Apocalypse fulfilled".

According to Philippe Lejeune, a consequence of the autobiographical pact is the referential pact, understood as a commitment to tell the truth, with the provision that: *the autobiographer is not someone who speaks the truth about his life, but someone who says that he speaks it* <sup>13</sup>. It does not matter whether the narration is a self-portrait or self-creation, or even mystification; what is important, as Mark Freeman repeats after Ricoeur, is "the truth of the self", second-order referentiality, and not accuracy of factographical detail <sup>14</sup>. When Żuławski commits himself to telling the truth about family history, he does so in a way which to him as the author seems the most adequate. Events presented in the film have, to a large extent, a metaphorical-symbolic (sign-based) character, and in this context they are neither a fabrication nor a pure account. Jerzy Kosiński, a prominent author of literary auto-fictions, warned against trusting too much in the thoroughness and literariness of memory records. He rightly noticed that what we remember from the past constitutes a certain construct in which emotions can be located, and these emotions can

only be expressed through symbols: *if memories have a truth, it is more an emotional than an actual one*<sup>15</sup>. If *The Third Part of the Night* is not fully anchored in the sphere of facts, it is because the story presented in the film is above all a manifestation of a child's feelings, and as such is based on memories reconstructed from a child's point of view, or actually on what has remained of them after many years. Hence, the film must be read from a symbolic rather than a realistic perspective. The chaos and absurdity of wartime images appearing in the presented world result from the binary viewpoint prevalent in their portrayal: behind the *alter ego* of the author of the film narrative, there hides the boy witness of authentic war events. The space of the apocalyptic world is, in a sense, filtered through the "child's gaze"; due to his age and lack of life experience, the boy does not fully understand the reality he has found himself in, and, witnessing events, he makes us, too, into witnesses adopting a child's perspective. Dominant in Żuławski's work, the category of emotional truth projects a viewer who will not only want to learn from the film what the author had gone through as a child, but also how he experienced it. In this case, Żuławski's approach is concurrent with principles regulating the broadly understood cultural reality, including the psychological language of culture: *Living in society and culture, human beings develop their own way of understanding the language of culture. Before acquiring a sufficient lexicon and developing abstract thinking, the mind of a little child is governed by the principles of visual-symbolic thinking. Such thinking is a language rooted in the archetypes of the collective unconscious and the cultural unconscious. It is based on a non-linear, symbolic and polichronic reception of reality. Things imagined and subjectively received are experienced as real*<sup>16</sup>. Visual and symbolic thinking does not completely disappear with age, but is pushed from its central position to the peripheries of the psyche. Visual language, on the basis of which the subjective image of the world is ordered in early childhood, is a permanent component of culture, activated in our contact with art and religion, in fantasies and dreams. It can be assumed that by using image, allegory and metaphor, art animates the visual-symbolic language, which is the fundamental language of communication between art and an individual's psyche.

In *The Third Part of the Night*, Andrzej Żuławski tells about his experience of war using film material which is visual and symbolic in character. The story is made up of situations seen and experienced: the stuff of various workings of imaginations. What is true and unquestionable in this narrative are the author's (and, consequently, the viewer's) emotions. They are expressed in figurative language, which is characterized by an accumulation of symbols and metaphors, fragmentariness, non-linearity, and lack of cause-effect logic. In this film parable about the past world which still lives in the author's memory, one can notice a tension between two discourses: the tendency to reconstruct the historical sequence and whole clashes with the force of memory and symbolic thinking, which pull towards non-linearity and are closer to the mechanism of association: *Rarely does the process of reconstructing memories preserve the order of events – we locate them through associations rather than methodical penetration, and we treat the past as an "archaeological museum" (...) of randomly scattered remains*<sup>17</sup>. Aleksander Ledóchowski rightly pointed out that Żuławski's film is characterized by an amassment of images and thoughts, billowing and expressive. Ledóchowski sees this kind of

a “gush of blood, bile and honey” as resulting from the author’s inner need: from compressing issues and problems which have to be addressed, but also keeping silent, from the accumulation of latent longing, thoughts and desires. He lists the following key features of the film’s poetics: transcendentalism of contents, brutal realism of episodes, mysticism, radical and shocking means of artistic expression, rich audio-visual composition. According to the critic, *the tumultuous arrangement and linking of particular situations bears some resemblance to a nightmare or pulsations of a wounded memory. (...) The film is multidimensional, labyrinthine, multi-layered*<sup>18</sup>. He continues in this vein in another article: *full of contradictions, it is something of a labyrinth: with corridors leading nowhere, mirrors reflecting past images, and blind illusory windows. From just the film itself it cannot even be determined whether Michał actually died or not*<sup>19</sup>. After the tragic death of his wife, son and mother, Michał leaves the family manor and moves to the city. He begins working for the Home Army under the cover name Szary, “Grey One”. He falls in love with a woman whose husband got killed by mistake instead of himself. For the sake of taking care of her and her new-born son, he takes up again the job he had quit before: lice feeding. The film presents Michał’s occupation in an almost para-documentary poetics. The credibility of this motif stems from the fact that in his novella Mirosław Żuławski thoroughly described the work of Weigl’s Institute, basing on his memories as well as detailed entries from his journal of that time. *The basic realities of the film are accurate, the director claimed, the fact that my father was a lice feeder, that the commander of the partisan division was blind, that I was born in similar circumstances as the child of the film protagonist. The cages for lice feeding were brought from Lviv, they are authentic German cages. (...) Also my characters’ way of life is real. All that the film is based on is real*<sup>20</sup>. When the director went to Gdańsk, where Weigl’s Institute had been moved after the war, he found that lice feeding was still continued: *Weigel [sic!] kept breeding them, he was a bit mad. Actually, he made an appearance in my film, there is a close-up on him dissecting lice. He brought them all to the film set, he had kept all that equipment. That work was permanent, because Weigl’s method of obtaining the protein that is the antibody had been continued until chemical equivalents for curing typhus were found. So that documentary part, which in a way is the essence of this film, was meticulously written out*<sup>21</sup>. Lice feeders were infected with lice toxin, they always had body temperature fluctuations, some got ill with typhus (the director’s father twice), and, as Żuławski explains, *with such daily conditions, they were like heavily drunk people, drunken like after rectified spirit, like after vodka. (...) They would never sober up, my father told me very much about that*<sup>22</sup>. This delirious outlook on reality is reflected by the camerawork. Blinking, unsteady, incomplete, fragmentary – the pictures are to trigger particular associations rather than presenting the course of events. Individual scenes have their own rhythm, emotional intensity, and even style. What is common for the majority of images is a kind of detachment from reality, a phantasmagorical character; after all, we enter into the realm of memory, and, moreover, we touch on matters which contradict the commonsensical, habitual way of perceiving reality. The arrangement of elements which constitute the presented world resembles an almost fractal structure, whose deformed, misshapen matter contains a logic measured by the adopted viewing perspective.

The apocalyptic reality of *The Third Part of the Night* has not only form, but also colour: *I chose grey and green hues, the colours of my childhood and fear; which contrast with the red of blood sucked by lice*<sup>23</sup>. The colour of life blends with the colours of dusk, creating a vivid metaphor of “fading time”. *If we try to imagine this “fading time”, we will probably see a “fading sun”, getting darker and darker, finally to become a “black sun”, and the world of the “black sun” (...) is a reality from which the source of light and warmth was taken away*, writes Paweł Rodak about literature of the war generation<sup>24</sup>. Thus, it is a world of darkness and cold – and such is the world presented in *The Third Part of the Night*. In a world where time has faded out, there is no place for a harmonious rhythm of day and night, and the order of successive periods of light and darkness is abolished: *Since time has been “cut in half”, in the world of cut time there is only the eternal night*<sup>25</sup>. Night features in the film not only as a symbolic motif, but above all as the principle of existence of a world in decay. Although in a film about the experience of the Apocalypse of war nocturnal imagery might not strike us as something extraordinary, it is significant, and its concept is very close to the literary equivalent of the film. Night often features in the literature of the time of occupation, usually as a synonym of war. *Just as the laws of war organise daily life in the occupied country, the laws of the night organise poetic imagination*, says Rodak about the works of second world war poets. *In a world which is at the same time a horror of war; night and dream, there is no clear division left between humans and non-human creatures, and further: between the living and the dead, material and non-material, real and unreal. Everything in this world loses its place in whatever thinkable order. It is a world without concrete places or concrete time; a world of monstrous forms without contours or shapes; a world of beings whose status is difficult to ascertain, beings suspended between existence and non-existence. It is populated only with headless phantoms, spectres, apparitions, shadows, ghosts (...), and, above all, it is a world full of corpses*<sup>26</sup>. Furthermore, Rodak underscores that in the poetry of the war generation, corpse is not only a materialised image of death, a synonym of a dead person; it is also a mode of existence on the threshold of life and death, a state in which living people see themselves as dead, experiencing their own death while alive. Death is one of the more important keywords to understanding the war generation. As Rodak aptly notes, in the literary output of the those “infected with war”, death, identified with night, is not something approaching, but rather something which is already there, encountered in daily experience. One is immersed in death, as in night and war: *Being trapped in death does not mean, however, the inevitability of a soon physical death, but rather the inescapability of death as an existential experience. He who lives under corpse-like bruise-purple sky, in the middle of the night which swells like a corpse, he who sleeps embracing corpses, partly becomes a corpse himself*<sup>27</sup>. *The Third Part of the Night* brings us into, or rather shows us around, an analogous representation of the “inside of war”. We notice that life inside war is a form of entrapment in death. Michał witnesses the deaths of many people, including his family. *We are no longer here*, his son Łukasz tells him, and yet keeps appearing together with his mother in Michał’s life. In the hospital basement, the protagonist sees his own dead body, and immediately afterwards gets fatally wounded in the larynx. When he finds himself in the family manor again, he sees his wife alive and dead at the same time. The war memory of the



*The Third Part of the Night*, dir. Andrzej Żuławski (1971)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

Żuławskis, both father and son, is a world full of corpses. The son speaks on his own and his father's behalf, and this makes the survivors' story a film parable about the dualism of human condition, about the mysterious duality of human nature. In the film, this split is inscribed in the space of the presented world.

### References to the already said

What is autobiographism? – asks Jerzy Jarzębski in his essay *Powieść jako autokreacja (Novel as self-creation): Is it more of the author's account of his or her own life, or rather a creation, a putting together of biographical myth out of the stuff of real facts?* <sup>28</sup>. The multiplicity of concepts and approaches suggests that theoreticians studying autobiographical narration have not reached a consensus on this matter. Philippe Lejeune, who authored the fundamental category of “the autobiographical pact”, keeps returning in his works to the relationship between autobiography, truth and person. In *Definir l'autobiographie*, he addresses problems which are to large extent relevant for the autobiographical discourse of Żuławski's *The Third Part of the Night*. According to Lejeune: *The promise to speak the truth, to distinguish truth from falsehood, is the basis of all social relations. (...) Autobiography has inscribed itself in the space of historical cognition as a desire for knowledge and understanding, and in the space of activity as a promise to offer this truth to others; it has also inscribed itself in the space of artistic relation. (...) As for the fact that individual identity in both writing and life is created thanks to narration, this does not mean in any way that it resides in the world of fiction. Placing myself in the written word, I carry forward that creation of “narrative identity”, which is, according to Paul Ricoeur, what our whole life relies on. Of course in trying to see myself better, I always keep creating myself, I rewrite drafts of my identity, and this gesture provisionally subjects them to stylisation or simplification. But I do not dabble in inventing myself. I follow the rules of story-telling, yet I remain faithful to my truth (...). If identity is imagined, autobiography which adheres to this imagined representation lies on the side of truth. And this has nothing to do with the intended play of fiction* <sup>29</sup>. In Zofia Mitosek's interpretation of Lejeune, the truth of an autobiography is ultimately determined not by the logical value of the utterance, but rather by the author's desire for self-knowledge, regardless of the extent to which such desire would deform the objective, actual content of a personal message: even if the narrative is not in accordance with the truth, what is true is its pragmatic motivation, aim <sup>30</sup>. Thus, Lejeune understands the referential pact as the author's commitment to tell the truth, yet with the provision that the autobiographer is not someone who tells the truth about his or her life, but rather someone who says that he or she tells it. Truth is inaccessible, especially when it concerns human life, but autobiography based on a representation of truth is possible. It exists when those who believe in it exist, for, according to Lejeune, it is not an object of aesthetic consumption, but a social means of understanding between humans: *Autobiography has been created to enable sharing a universum of values, sensitivity towards the world, unknown experiences – all that within the framework of personal relations, perceived as authentic and non-fictional* <sup>31</sup>. Many authors have discussed the important problem of the coexistence of “design and truth” in autobiographical narratives. In this case, Barbara Skarga's reflections seem rele-

vant: *That story of mine may turn out to be a myth. This, however, is irrelevant for the constitution of my identity. Nobody has proven that the I must build itself on truth. (...) The more painstakingly I search for sense in my story, the more deeply I investigate my own actions, their motives, my experiences, suffering, the better I see their entanglement in and dependence on things outside myself, various powers, circumstances. (...) Hence, in the attempt at making sense are inherent contradictory tensions, which result from the dialectics between what is mine and what transgresses "mineness", being general, alien, between my history and the history of the surrounding world, between my view of the past, my remembering, and the memory of others.*

*(...) The question that remains unresolved is whether I create a story in order to find myself, or, conversely, it is this story that creates myself, even though it is full of gaps and distortions* <sup>32</sup>.

Thus, at the basis of writing oneself and one's work out in autobiography lies the overriding need for self-knowledge, for speaking about oneself, pursuing the truth about oneself, even if that truth should be incomplete and fragmentary, and the process of making sense should not be entirely under control of the person concerned. This indefiniteness and unclearness of relationships with the past, which often reinforces the autobiographical pact, features also in the auto-narrative of Andrzej Żuławski, who based the autobiographical discourse constitutive for his film on a remembrance project of his father, writer Mirosław Żuławski. Lejeune, one of the pioneers of research on "collaborative autobiography", argues that in such cases it is fundamentally significant to ask whether the text was initiated by the teller or the writer, as there is no balance of power between them <sup>33</sup>. The concept of collaborative autobiography is an essentially problematic idea. It provokes various reflections, for instance on the author, the owner of the life which is being told, the addressee of the message, the responsibility for the intentions of the autobiographical declaration. It also prompts us to ask what such narrative actually is and how it influences the shaping of the autobiographical space. Thus, what turns out to be important in creating and at the same time revealing the autobiographical space of *The Third Part of the Night* is the intertextual space, which, as Stanisław Balbus put it, *designates for itself and opens the text every time through the technique of intertextual references used in that text* <sup>34</sup>. In his essay *L'autobiocopie*, Lejeune claims: *We never write without having read and listened – to everything: autobiography does not feed on autobiography alone. All utterances, all fictions, all aphorisms, poems, paintings and musical pieces which we selected and absorbed mix in the melting pot of our identity. (...) Autobiography begins to "write itself" already in the very life, intertextuality does not begin at the point when we lean over a blank page, and this is why it is so easy to miss* <sup>35</sup>. Lejeune limits his discussion to the case of citation. Małgorzata Czermińska, on the other hand, distinguishes four kinds of references to texts, to "the already said": auto-commentary, reference to somebody else's autobiography, reference to one's own non-autobiographical text, or to such text by another author <sup>36</sup>. As Czermińska emphasises, apart from the horizontal relationship between two types of texts, of decisive significance is (...) *reference to a kind of a "third force", when we go beyond the universe of mutually interrelated texts into the extra-sign and extra-code realm, into personality, which creates autobiographical writing and observes its own reflection*

in it<sup>37</sup>. Then the above-listed categories of reference (...) *turn their other side toward us, one which was not visible before. The first category connects with the third one (in both cases these are references to one's own texts), and the second with the fourth one (references to texts by others). The distinction between the autobiographical and the fictional, is replaced by a different one: I speak or somebody else speaks*<sup>38</sup>.

The thus understood relationship of reference to “the already said” is a highly important category in the autobiographical discourse of *The Third Part of the Night*. In the associative and polyphonic stream of Żuławski's personal revelations, their content is subject to a dual order, so that main themes are arranged in doubles (e.g. the duality of Michał's, his wife's and son's existence after death). The doubleness of composition and some thematic motifs not only shapes the personal identity of the speaking author, but also actualises a process aptly summarized in Jacques Derrida's thesis about the existence of two texts in one: *Two texts, two hands, two visions, two ways of listening. Together simultaneously and separately*<sup>39</sup>. The first text contains a key to the other text, and together they complement each other, creating an auto-narrative composed of a strange mixture of emotions and forgetting. The construction of the world presented in the *Their Part of the Night* keeps revealing yet new meanings. Events and situations are portrayed in a manner which suggests that everything happened not just once and, what is more, simultaneously, but somehow it has happened many times, in the past and now, here and in infinity. This way of perceiving reality reaches back to Blake's philosophy and the literature of Romanticism. And since the 20<sup>th</sup> century has sharpened the concept of the doubleness of entities, the labyrinthine representation of the world in *The Third Part of the Night* resembles Lacanian wanderings in search of *significance* or Barthesian *écriture*.

### The Żuławskis' poetics of memory

It follows that *The Third Part of the Night* presents itself not quite as an example of an autobiographical event, but rather as a fiction essay with an autobiographical base. Tadeusz Lubelski describes it as a borderline case *in which the free, collage-like structure of a journal combines with an autobiographical balance statement, a “totalising attempt”*. *And it is not about full reconstruction of the life path (as in autobiography), but rather about reaching the essence of existence, the metaphysical core, by delving in the memory of its various fragments*<sup>40</sup>. Żuławski's film makes use of the poetics of essay writing and the double perspective characteristic of this literary form: *The essayist, a writer or a film-maker, thinks in terms of common things, referring to tradition and everyday experience generally present in culture, and yet the vision he creates is individual and unique. It is permeated with subjectivism, both in the approach to a topic, in its presentation, and in the way of narrating it. (...) On the one hand, the artist presents a world which exists beyond him, together with its inherent mechanisms; on the other, he superimposes on it a grid of his own notions, thoughts, feelings, and manipulates it arbitrarily, which is decisive for subsequent interpretation*<sup>41</sup>. In relation to the category of subjectivism, two problem areas suggest themselves. The first one would concern the poetics of the film, and here we could mention the metaphorical, sign-based narrative



*The Third Part of the Night*, dir. Andrzej Żuławski (1971)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

form. The other area is more difficult to identify, as it overlaps with the first: what is meant here is subjectivism connected with the author's emotional involvement and the exposure of his personality through references to personal feelings and experiences. This brings Żuławski's film close to spiritual autobiography. As Czermińska puts it, *In such utterances, the narrator resembles the speaking "I" of lyrical poetry. The writing process is sometimes compared to vivisection, it can be a difficult and risky work of self-cognition and it can lead to unexpected outcomes. Introvert writing may serve as a kind of auto-therapy and self-creation. Sometimes, the imaginative process of studying one's own self (...) transforms into deliberate posing. Then, alongside the self-absorbed author, there emerges the reader, for whom the poses are meant*<sup>42</sup>. Żuławski's film is designed as a provocation, as a challenge to the viewers, who get involved in the very process of message construction. The impression of visual dissonance and the deprivation effect of the film on the level of perception can make the viewer feel anxiously helpless, so that reflection on authorial strategy is brought down to the question: How to read this very personal text about the Holocaust?

Like none other, art which thematises experiences of the Holocaust invites reflection on the relationship between the work and its recipient, or, to be more precise, the ethical determinants of such relationship. This type of artistic production evokes certain emotional states in the recipients, depending mainly on their individual mental disposition. In this respect, works about the Holocaust seem rather disinterested and free of presumptions, save for one: the need to bear witness. The need to remember and reconstruct one's own borderline experiences corresponds with the recipients' need to find them – in this sense, the recipient is not completely disinterested. The problem shared by recipients of all works thematising the experience of the Holocaust, including *The Third Part of the Night*, is how to find a strategy that will enable the fullest possible understanding and interpretation of such works, so that the act of reading is not limited to a passive adventure but becomes a “responsible response”. All discussions centred around the problems of memory, filling the void after the Holocaust, appropriation of trauma, catharsis, or repetition, show that the difficulty of finding one's place in this discourse is shared by both those who remember and those whose image of the war is shaped by more or less authentic accounts of the survivors.

Two main approaches, two “schools of reading” can be adopted vis-à-vis the autobiographical discourse of *The Third Part of the Night*. On the level of the ethical determinants of text-recipient relationship, we can maintain detachment, and the act of detachment, as Martha Nussbaum argues, is the basic element of empathy<sup>43</sup>. Empathy enables an imagination-based reconstruction of the other's experiences without judging or evaluation, and thus it is far removed from compassion. In this sense, empathy makes it possible to understand properly somebody else's states and emotions, though at the same time it lacks the element of personal involvement. In contact with the personal rendering of Holocaust experience in the *Third Part of the Night*, a rendering determined by its autobiographism, a thus understood empathy provides recipients with the necessary detachment, without which one might (or would have to) find oneself on the other side, entering the mass grave, a pit full of corpses. According to Nussbaum, the feeling of empathy, if properly understood, allows us to focus on the sufferer's experiences, yet we have to remember that this is only a model of preferred emotional reactions, as in reality the borders between compassion, sympathy, commiseration and empathy are often blurred. A radical strategy has been proposed by Ágnes Heller, who believes that with regard to the Holocaust, memory should consist in actual suffering, which is the more severe because it is meaningless<sup>44</sup>. The practice of memory discussed by Heller means immersing oneself in meaninglessness; it has ritual character. What matters here is a particular kind of emotional re-actualisation of past events, an authentic experience of pain, in which: *Approaching lack of sense takes place through communing with this lack, its assimilation and reconstruction*<sup>45</sup>.

An autobiographical reading of *The Third Part of the Night* yields interesting conclusions regarding the manifestation of autobiographism in the film's structure and pragmatics, i.e. the sender-text-recipient relationship. The sender's specific communicative attitude, as intended in the film, and the resulting intended behaviour of the recipient arrange themselves into opposing patterns. Andrzej Żuławski bases his strategy of remembering the time of the Holocaust on a Hellerian immersion in the meaninglessness of the time of night, on emotional re-actualisation of

experiences remembered from childhood, and those passed on by his parents. This translates above all into the style and poetics of the film, which force the recipient of this story to adopt a distinctly detached position against it. A dose of necessary detachment, not only critical one, allows viewers to find the autobiographical elements of the film and trace their meaning, without burdening the consciousness of those “born later” (the recipients) with somebody else’s traumatic experiences.

Investigating the autobiographical discourse of *The Third Part of the Night* calls for a reflection on the memory discourse inscribed in the film plot. Andrzej and Mirosław Żuławski clearly suggest that returning to the apocalyptic past is an almost futile activity, for it is difficult to find any sense in the remembered experiences. There is a certain aporia in their autobiographical message: governed by the aesthetics of fragment, it does not constitute a coherent whole, but rather an intimate mental patchwork, in which individual fragments shed light on each other over and again. In lieu of a complete structure, we get a living form filled with meaningful images, which only rarely turn into a coherent narrative. In this light, the autobiographical narration of *The Third Part of the Night* appears as a supporting structure secondary to the (non)sense of the world of the Holocaust which the author wishes to present, as a framework of understanding and cognition. Its important function is to capture life, processes and events which unfold in time, turning them into “complete structures of sense”. If we treat the category of narration as a constitutive component of human identity, the latter becomes understood as a “narrative identity”<sup>46</sup>. Narrative identity, or at least the individual narrative identity, is not possible without a *self-aware subject (the “I”), without a clear division into the internal and the external, into the “I” and the world, the “I” and other people, and finally without placing oneself and the world in the temporal order of subsequent events. To express it in the conceptual language of history of ideas, one can say that it is about individualism, rationalism, and historicism; in the language of the theory and history of literature – this would be realism and autobiographism*<sup>47</sup>. The convention of re-constructing war-marked reality proposed by Żuławski in *The Third Part of the Night* suggests that the personal memory of father and son is overbuilt around the autobiographical narrative, and their identity is constituted by both categories. After all, it is thanks to the narrative process that we orient ourselves in the basic dimensions of our existence, endowing it with coherent sense: *we determine our relation to the past and tradition, we give our life a form of an aim-oriented pursuit, and we define our attitude towards others. (...) To know who you are means to be able to tell yourself the fundamental moments of your identity: this is done through individual narrative, embedded in the narrative of the community from which the individual stems, and the community narrative is, in turn, part of the great cultural-historical narrative. For a human being, to have an identity means more than just to be; to have an identity means: to repeat constantly, and thus to reinforce and confirm the act of self-interpretation*<sup>48</sup>.

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- <sup>1</sup> R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Między autobiografią a literaturą*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 15-16.
- <sup>2</sup> T. Lubelski, *Autor jako bohater. O postawie autobiograficznej w filmie*, in: *Autor w filmie*, ed. M. Hendrykowski, Poznań 1991, p. 91.
- <sup>3</sup> Żuławski, *Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej*, ed. P. Kletowski, P. Marecki, Warszawa 2008, p. 14.
- <sup>4</sup> *Pojedynek w Riwierze*, "Kino" 1971, no. 12, p. 17.
- <sup>5</sup> *Jesteśmy mięsem dla tygrysa. Z A. Żuławskim rozmawia T. Lubelski*, "Kino" 1992, no. 7, p. 6.
- <sup>6</sup> Żuławski... op. cit., p. 24.
- <sup>7</sup> *Pojedynek w Riwierze*, op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> Żuławski... op. cit., p. 148.
- <sup>9</sup> *Opętanie. Ekstremalne kino i pisarstwo A. Żuławskiego*, ed. S. Naitza, Warszawa 2004, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>10</sup> Żuławski... op. cit., pp. 86-87.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. ibidem, p. 88, and Mirosław Żuławski's memories published in "Twój Styl" magazine 1993 (no. 1, 2, 3, 22).
- <sup>12</sup> B. Sycówna, *Obszar pogranicza*, "Kino" 1988, no. 4, p. 25.
- <sup>13</sup> P. Lejeune, *Definir l'autobiographie*, paper presented at the 1st International Conference on Auto/Biography in Beijing, 21-14 June 1999; here quoted after the Polish edition: P. Lejeune, *Czy można zdefiniować autobiografię?* in: idem, *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii*, trans. W. Grajewski, S. Jaworski, A. Labuda, R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, ed. R. Lubas-Bartoszyńska, Kraków 2007, p. 2. For a book-length collection of Lejeune's essays in English, see: P. Lejeune, *On autobiography*, trans. K. Leary, ed. P. Eakin, Minneapolis 1989. A comprehensive list of English translations of Lejeune's individuals papers and essays can be found at his homepage: [http://www.autopacte.org/Bibliographie\\_personnelle.html#Anglais](http://www.autopacte.org/Bibliographie_personnelle.html#Anglais) [translator's note].
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. M. Freeman, *Rewriting the Self. History, Memory, Narrative*, London 1993, p. 113.
- <sup>15</sup> J. Kosiński, *Notes of the Author on "The Painted Bird"*, in: idem, *Passing By*, New York 1992, p. 204.
- <sup>16</sup> Z. W. Dudek, *Psychologiczny język kultury*, in: Z. W. Dudek, A. Pankalla, *Psychologia kultury. Doświadczenia graniczne i transkulturowe*, Warszawa 2005, p. 245.
- <sup>17</sup> D. Lowenthal, *Przeszłość to obcy kraj*, "Res Publica" 1991, no. 3, pp. 20, 21.
- <sup>18</sup> A. Ledóchowski, *Czas zatraty, czas odkupienia*, "Kino" 1971, no. 10, p. 5.
- <sup>19</sup> Idem, *List otwarty*, "Kino" 1971, no. 12, p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup> *Pojedynek w Riwierze*, op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>21</sup> Żuławski... op. cit., p. 89.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 90-91.
- <sup>23</sup> *Opętanie...* op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>24</sup> P. Rodak, *Wizje kultury pokolenia wojennego*, Wrocław 2000, pp. 55-56.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 56.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibidem, pp. 56, 59.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 60.
- <sup>28</sup> J. Jarzębski, *Powieść jako autokreacja*, in: *Powieść jako autokreacja*, Kraków 1984, p. 412.
- <sup>29</sup> P. Lejeune, op. cit., p. 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Z. Mitosek, *Hermeneuta i autobiografia*, "Teksty Drugie" 2002, no. 3, p. 139.
- <sup>31</sup> P. Lejeune, op. cit., p. 18.
- <sup>32</sup> B. Skarga, *Tożsamość, ja i pamięć*, "Znak" 1995, no. 5, pp. 12-18.
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. P. Lejeune, *Qui est l'auteur?*, here quoted after the Polish edition: *Kto jest autorem?* in: idem, *Wariacje...* op. cit.
- <sup>34</sup> S. Balbus, *Między stylami*, Kraków 1993, p. 155.
- <sup>35</sup> P. Lejeune, *L'autobiocopie*, here quoted after the Polish edition: *Autobiokopia*, in: idem, *Wariacje...* op. cit., p. 221.
- <sup>36</sup> M. Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie*, Kraków 2000.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 101.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 102.
- <sup>39</sup> J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago 1982, p. 65.
- <sup>40</sup> T. Lubelski, op. cit., p. 99.
- <sup>41</sup> E. Lachnit, *Esej filmowy*, "Powiększenie" 1982, no. 4, pp. 20-21.
- <sup>42</sup> M. Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt...* op. cit., p. 22.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. M. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought. Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge 2003.
- <sup>44</sup> A. Heller, *Pamięć i zapomnienie. O sensie i braku sensu*, trans. A. Kopacki, "Przegląd Polityczny" 2001, no. 52-53.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibidem, s. 27.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. K. Rosner, *Narracja, tożsamość i czas*, Kraków 2003.
- <sup>47</sup> P. Rodak, *Narracja – dziennik – tożsamość. Przesłanki (projektowanej) antropologii literatury*, in: *Narracja i tożsamość (I)*, ed. W. Bolecki, R. Nycz, Warszawa 2004, p. 225.
- <sup>48</sup> A. Bielik-Robson, *Wstęp. My, romantycy – źródła romantycznego modernizmu Charlesa Taylora*, in: Ch. Taylor, *Źródła podmiotowości. Narodziny tożsamości nowoczesnej*, Warszawa 2001, pp. XXXIII-XXXIV.

# The Story of a Certain Illusion

Theories of kitsch and *The Double Life of Veronique*  
by Krzysztof Kieślowski

AGNIESZKA MORSTIN

Maria Poprzęcka in her book *O zlej sztuce (On bad art)* being so far the most comprehensive and the most balanced Polish monograph on kitsch speaks about an axiological paralysis which characterises modern writing dedicated to artistic phenomena. In accordance with the researcher's diagnosis this paralysis results from the chaos caused in the area of art by lack of limitations to aesthetic norms inherited from modernity, which thanks to its subsequent waves of avant-garde movements caused distrust towards all previously recognised canons and systems of values.

So, does it make any sense in the era of triumph of creative freedom and cult of originality to decide what is and what is not worthy to be called art? Art with the capital "A" is so often so far away from any standards that even among specialists it causes consternation and in consequence – fear to evaluate and assess it. And the more art escapes us the more difficult it is to classify kitsch. Having lost positive models of artistic activity from our sight we have increasing difficulty with the identification of their opposites.

The only thing we can do is follow a kind of instinct whose existence is decided by a deeply-rooted conviction that: *bad art is in the first place untrue, that is, pretending to be something in fact it is not. The "untrue nature" contains all such features as imitativeness, lack of authenticity, illusiveness, derivative character, pretentiousness and creation of appearances. Badness in art is in the first place falsehood. (...) The deep conviction and feeling that identifies badness in art with the lack of truth points to the inseparability of aesthetic, ethical and cognitive criteria*<sup>1</sup>. In fact – it is impossible to speak about kitsch, which the author diplomatically but not without cause calls bad art, only in aesthetic categories.

Reflection upon this question requires taking into the account wider existential and ethical perspective whose vastness we owe to a great extent to theories of kitsch formulated in the last century. Laying ground for the analysis of the film by Krzysztof Kieślowski I refer to three of these theories – that is theories of Hermann Broch, Abraham Moles and Milan Kundera reflecting the changes in thinking about kitsch and deepening awareness that analysis of this phenomenon becomes more and more significant for the understanding of the condition of a modern man.

### Radical contempt. Hermann Broch's theory of kitsch

Reflection on kitsch for a long time has run according to a path set by Hermann Broch. In essays and lectures created between 1930 and 1950 the writer presented his theory regarding the genesis of kitsch and the mechanism of its functioning against the background of a wide historical and cultural perspective<sup>2</sup>. The basis of his conception rests on the assumption that kitsch is an anti-system of art – distorting mirror of its values, no matter what forms it assumes, it is always governed by the same rule. This rule is: “Work beautifully!” and it is the negation of the rule “Work well!”<sup>3</sup> which on the other hand governs art.

According to the researcher “work beautifully” from the point of view of the creative process means to prefer the aesthetic value of work over its ethical value which in the process of creation should have a superior position. As value he understands any human activity aimed at cognition, in other words putting chaos in order. Broch calls it forming. In the open system of artistic values, forming is a dynamic process of creating newer and newer artistic values due to the need to incessantly penetrate previously unrecognised areas of reality. From this perspective cognition is the highest value in the system of art and is seen as ethically positive since its aim is to get closer to the “Truth”, an idea understood in Platonic meaning – an eternal, barely sensed, unreachable model. According to Broch's argumentation an artist “works well” when he tries to make his work the best possible reflection of the idea of “Truth” at the same time treating “Beauty”<sup>4</sup> solely as the fruit of the creative effort. This aesthetic value of a work is of secondary meaning as an externalisation of what is ethical.

In the case of kitsch, however, we are dealing with the negation of the above regularity. It is not created in truth-searching process of creation and forming but in the process of manufacturing devoid of a cognitive purpose. From the perspective of hierarchy of values in the system of art, kitsch becomes a lie, an anti-value because in its system beauty takes the place of the truth. The badness here means unconditional aesthetic dogmatism which manifests itself in the derivative nature of kitsch making it a system closed to everything that would force its creator to defy the established models of beauty. For that reason instead of development, constant retreat from what was and instead of a search for a new shape of beauty, in the case of kitsch we are dealing with conservative and conformist multiplication of tested patterns. In result we shift from the area of aesthetics, to the area of aestheticism where beauty, devoid of its essence, i.e. truth, becomes reduced to a conventional effect of beautification.

Developing in the shadow of art the anti-system of kitsch already has its history and its golden age, the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>5</sup> – the era in which peak of romanticism goes hand in hand with a sudden expansion of the burgesses and the development of culture of an industrial society. However in the form in which it survived till today kitsch had been born earlier. According to Broch we should look for its sources in the times of Reformation when the burgesses won their own cultural identity. In its first, puritan form the spiritual culture of the burgesses was still an alternative to the dominating court culture. Having assumed a simple and austere form, it expresses the rebellion against the sensual and full of flair and libertine in its spirit aristocratic aesthetic tradition which was expressed best in the rococo art of *ancien*

*régime* where it finally reached its end. Along with the process of transformation of the feudal society into an industrial one, the culture-creative role of the aristocracy gradually decreased and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this role to a great extent was taken by the burghesses. Thus the attitude of rebellion lost its *raison d'être* and in consequence the bourgeois ideology of asceticism became redundant. Also the previous model of spirituality established during the Reformation and which could be defined as “individualistic” changed. *The Reformation* – argues Broch – *came about due to a great discovery, which was partly mystical and partly theological and rational: this was the discovery of the awareness of the absolute, the infinite, of the divine conscience of the human mind. This brought the act of revelation into every single human soul and thereby saddled it with the responsibility of faith, responsibility that the Church had previously borne* <sup>6</sup>. This responsibility in connection with the ideal of asceticism and Puritanism, however, proved unbearable – the lonely man of the West, left to himself with a Bible in his hands quickly started to look for relief in spiritual exaltation transposing the ideal of asceticism and focus into passion. With the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Broch, *In so doing it simply introduces the most terrestrial aspects of life into eternal and immortal kingdom* <sup>7</sup>. Exaltation as substitute and inept spirituality spreads, borne from excessive pride and self-admiration of an individual treating their body as a temple. On the other hand when from the burghesses the bourgeoisie develops, the attitude of exaltation is an already established convention of communing with art as creation and source of pleasure and with the exalted recipient characterised by predilection to decorativeness, nobility and the tendency to nostalgia and the cult of “internal life”. The dissemination of this attitude created a fertile ground for the superficial assimilation of values that Romanticism brought with it, recognising in the 19<sup>th</sup> century kitsch its unwanted but as it will appear later – eternal child. Broch concludes: *Romanticism (...) was incapable of producing average values. Every slip from the level of genius was immediately transformed into a disastrous fall from the cosmic heights to kitsch* <sup>8</sup>.

Calling kitsch evil, sin, or an artistic blasphemy and comparing its system to the “system of Antichrist” the author in no case tries to take an objective stance towards the object of his deliberations. Quite the opposite, when speaking about kitsch in 1933 he calls for condemnation of all its manifestations: *The maker of kitsch (...) rather he is ethically deprived, a criminal willing radical evil. And since it is radical evil that is manifest here, evil per se, forming the absolute negative pole of every value-system, kitsch will always be evil, not just kitsch in art, but kitsch in every value-system that is not an imitation system (...). Would you like an example of colossal kitsch? Nero strumming his lute as he watches the spectacular burning of Christians: the specific dilettante, the specific aesthete who does everything to make maximum aesthetic effects* <sup>9</sup>.

From today’s perspective these words sound extremely radical. We have to remember, however, that they come from an essay written in 1933 when on the European political stage appeared a new “specific dilettante and the specific aesthete” – fierce painter and lover of mountain landscapes – Adolf Hitler <sup>10</sup>.

As much as the mirage of kitsch and consumerism experienced by us today does not seem especially demonic, its alliance with totalitarianism at the threshold

of 1930s justly seemed very foreboding. Farsightedness of these fears is confirmed for example by the book from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Croatian writer, Dubravka Ugrešić, entitled *The Culture of Lies*, in which the author dedicates a lot of attention to the ancillary nature of kitsch in relation to the ideology of communism and nationalism <sup>11</sup>.

To sum up let us add that Hermann Broch places the responsibility for the existence of kitsch in the first place on a “kitsch-man” who assumes an instrumental attitude towards art and starts the mechanism of kitsch manufacture. When Broch formulated his first conclusions regarding the psychology of kitsch he clearly underlined that when talking about it, he spoke not so much about art, but about a certain attitude towards life: (...) *In a broad sense art always reflects the image of contemporary man, and if kitsch represents falsehood (it is often defined, and rightly so), this falsehood falls back on the person in need of it, on the person who uses this highly considerate mirror so as to be able to recognise himself in the counterfeit image it throws back of him and to confess his own lies (with a delight which is to a certain extent sincere)* <sup>12</sup>.

#### **An attempt at systematisation. Five rules governing kitsch according to Abraham Moles**

Abraham Moles’ *Kitsch, the Art of Happiness*, the monograph created in the second half of the 1970, is an attempt to systemise the phenomenon by making it the object of scientific enquiry in order to enable him to present the problem in a less evaluating and more analytical way. Going beyond the purely intuitive perception of kitsch proved however a very difficult task. Even semantic analysis of the word “kitsch” proved quite problematic due to the connotative character of the term. The area of denotation corresponding to it remains so vast that it is impossible to define semantic borders of the word. Moles’ analytical effort does not lead to grasping of the essence of the phenomenon – the ambiguity and great capacity of the notion of kitsch means that it is sometimes identified with a certain attitude, or a process, or atmosphere, while in some contexts the spirit of kitsch is mentioned. In general it tends to be perceived in psychological categories, that is it is seen as a specific relation between an individual and the realm of objects, a relation based on fetishisation. When treating an object as a fetish, man does not use it but relishes it, seeing its value not in its functionality but in the fact that it makes human life more pleasant and beautiful. The existence of this kind of a relation is a specific trait of culture based on possession. Kitsch presents itself as the aesthetics of bourgeoisie prosperity: (...) *contribution to studies on kitsch would consist in redefining a burgess based on the spirit of kitsch* (...) <sup>13</sup>.

Marked with this spirit is especially the sphere of everyday life which in the smallest manifestations and rites undergoes the process of aestheticisation. This process in the first place has physiological grounds: transformation of an object into an aesthetic fetish makes it in the eyes of its owner a materialised representation of happiness. What matters is not its artistic or functional value but about its symbolic function.

Even though we will not find in Moles’ work a clear definition of kitsch he points to some of its features that might easily be treated as crucial. In the first

place we have to include universality and ophelimity. The former comes down to formal diversity of this phenomenon and its presence in all the realms of life, both individual and collective. The latter – ophelimity – means “purchasability”, that is, subjection of kitsch to the rights of the market and its absolute dependency on social acceptance.

The author also lists five rules that govern kitsch. He starts with the rule of *unfitness*. It comes down to a certain excess of form over content manifesting its excessive and unnecessary aestheticisation being a complete negation of functionalism. It manifests itself for example in the above-mentioned fetishisation of everyday objects. Instead of a functional they start to perform a decorative role that to a lesser or greater extent is in contradiction with their original purpose.

The next rule consists of an attempt of *accumulation* – it comes from rococo as art of overabundance and eclecticism. On the basic level the rule of accumulation is connected with a typically bourgeois love for gathering objects and filling space with them. It is worth underlining that the notion of accumulation as special because falling into an extreme version of eclecticism fits wonderfully the state of contemporary culture being one of the basic indicators of postmodernism.

From the rule of accumulation results directly the characteristic for kitsch rule of *synesthetic perception*. In this case it is a question of maximum involvement of sensory channels in the process of perception. The accumulation of various means of expression in one work as well as its impact on a number of senses simultaneously requires a multidirectional perception. Everything just to make it possible to maximally intensify the message which due to its pushiness will not leave anybody indifferent.

The fourth rule of functioning of kitsch is the *rule of mediocrity*. The easiest way to identify it is to refer to its opposite which means all avant-garde, innovative and destructive tendencies. Kitsch avoids aesthetic risk, it is characterised by radical conformism and subjection to mass tastes. The dogma or mediocrity is connected with the above-described requirement of ophelimity. Another consequence of this rule is the accessibility of the work-kitsch or object-kitsch, giving the recipient a sense of superiority, domination and control over the object of perception.

The last of the rules defined by Moles is the *rule of comfort*. Thanks to it kitsch is a source of a sense of safety, reward and satisfaction of the need for pleasure.

Thanks to it a specific aura of acceptance is created – being neither a challenge nor a mystery, kitsch does not want to be interpreted but admired. Instead of being an object of cognition, it prefers to become an object of desire and a guarantee of easy pleasure which gives it its hedonistic trait.

The above attempt to analyse the mechanism of functioning of kitsch with all its ambiguity may serve as one of the basic tools for its description. Psychological aspect of the functioning of kitsch and its social conditions were treated here with special attention. Moles also seems to be familiar with semiotic and structuralistic approaches. Justification of such a comprehensive research method is to be found of course in the nature of this phenomenon – its multiformity, heterogeneity and universality.

### Our everyday aesthetics and morality. Kunderian kitsch

If Hermann Broch pointed to the fact that narrowing of the notion of kitsch only to artistic junk is not enough because this phenomenon goes beyond the sphere of aesthetics and should be considered in ethical and existential categories, then Milan Kundera is the continuator of such thinking, his *The Art of the Novel* ends with the following reflection: *Today, fifty years later, Broch's remark is becoming truer still. Given the imperative necessity to please and thereby to gain the attention of the greatest number, the aesthetic of the mass media is inevitably that of kitsch; and as the mass media come to embrace and to infiltrate more and more of our life, kitsch becomes our everyday aesthetic and moral code*<sup>14</sup>.

We might say that Kunderian kitsch is similar to Gombrowicz's problem of form – it constitutes the key perspective from which the creator sees and interprets the reality. In Gombrowicz's world there is no escape from form; one can at most escape from one form to another. In the universe created by Kundera the place of form is taken by kitsch which *becomes our everyday aesthetic and moral code*. Even though life beyond its reach is possible, it is a life paid for with rebellion condemning a person to isolation and rejection by the community. In *The Art of the Novel* the writer introduces important distinction between two elements accompanying the development of modern European culture – “the spirit of a novel” and “the spirit of kitsch”. The latter is an absolute negation of the former which manifests itself in ambiguity, relativity, complexity, tradition and uncertainty as categories from the perspective of which human existential condition is seen. In order to render as faithfully as possible Kundera's idea of kitsch I will use his favourite form of a dictionary. From among notions that he himself considers to be crucial for his work were selected these regarding the notion of kitsch or directly related to it. Together they create a dense, organised whole, a kind of system of thoughts whose elements result from each other.

THE IDYLL – means the fulfilment of a hedonist ideal. It refers to the situation of the world before the first conflict, the existential paradise in which Adam lived, a living reflection of the land of bliss. Adam was not a man, he was a part of the idyll – his existence had a completely positive dimension and was set in time of the cyclically returning happiness. The entire sense of his existence was contained in this undisturbed cycle. Adam's happiness was permanently inscribed in his existence – it was in fact identical with it. Only upon the end of the idyll humanity begins. Then, a man, knocked out from the cyclical time, enters the linear historical time marked with uncertainty. Since happiness ceases to be obvious it appears that human existence may have a negative dimension and this is absolutely unacceptable. Man sees this negative dimension also inside him – recognising it in his corporeality, he learns about the sense of shame and thus says goodbye to the idyll forever.

CATEGORICAL AGREEMENT WITH BEING – an idealistic and irrational existential attitude resulting from the conviction that the world and the man are perfect, the work of God not contaminated by any negative elements. It would be justified only in the situation of the idyll which from the perspective of human condition, however, is not possible anymore. For that reason, man aware of the pathetic impurity of his body faces the inevitable question: why was I created in a way which humiliates me and does not allow me to see only beauty inside myself? In



*The Double Life of Veronique*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1991)

reply to this question, not able to bear the truth about the ugliness inseparable from human existence and wishing to forget his own imperfection, he creates artificial idylls around him which are at the same time the lands of kitsch. (...) *the aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is the world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist. This aesthetic ideal is called kitsch*<sup>15</sup>. This ideal takes on various forms. The categorical agreement with being means absolute acceptance of what is its basis and bases may be different. Man, who thinks that such a base is, for example, the communist ideology as exhaustive and the only correct explanation of the world containing its entire sense, is under the influence of communist kitsch which from now on becomes his aesthetics and morality. Similar mechanism accompanies the creation of religious, fascist or feminist kitsch to recall a few key examples mentioned by Kundera.

TERMINAL PARADOXES<sup>16</sup> – these are cracks within the system of modern European culture seen as a building founded on the value of Cartesian mind. These cracks manifested themselves in the strongest way when it appeared that the mind had triumphed completely allowing men to control nature and the course of history. Along with the outbreak of WWI, a great trauma of the European consciousness, it appeared that the mind was an illusion. The more nature was tamed the more it disappeared. On the other hand, history assumed traits of an element which was impossible to control; it changed into a disastrous power controlling human fate and threatening even his internal freedom. As a consequence, civilisation saturated with the spirit of mind was eaten away by irrationalism – this is the basic paradox of modern times. Another decadent paradox is the great expansion of kitsch, that is, “categorical agreement with being” devoid of an existential base.

STUPIDITY OF CERTAINTY – one of the basic indicators of kitsch. Opposite of “the wisdom of uncertainty” being the virtue of a novel. The certainty means belief that it is possible to make unambiguous judgements about reality. Deciding about what is good and what is bad does not pose any difficulties because it is a consequence of adopted in advance assumptions and not a result of critical thinking forcing us to pose questions. The stupidity of certainty manifests itself through platitudes, that is, widespread simplified truths reducing the complexity of reality to a given pattern. It always divides the world into two dichotomous spheres of “good” and “evil”, this – let us notice – in an especially clear way manifests itself for example through present historical policy presenting communist Poland as a dark land in which every sphere of human life was dominated by the ideology of communism.

QUESTION – identifies “the wisdom of uncertainty” and is a condition of all art. By asking questions we overthrow the screen of kitsch when we want to see the truth hiding behind it. The pictures painted by Kundera’s protagonist, Sabina, constitute a visual metaphor of kitsch. Their foreground – studied with a truly photographic precision kitschy landscape whose “perfectness” was destroyed by an unexpected flaw, intended stain of paint suggesting a hidden sense. Failure, doubt and namely the question sneaked into the space of obviousness. The question, being an unexpected breach in the system of kitsch – shifting the centre of gravity from what Sabina calls an understandable lie to the incomprehensible truth.

REDUCTION – the mechanism of creation of kitsch consisting in reducing ambiguous truths to banalities, platitudes and mental stereotypes. The process of reduction is a process of conventionalisation and standardisation visible on all levels

of human activity. It results from helplessness towards the fact that reality has a form of a mad labyrinth in which every path embodies a different system of values and what is even worse – each proves to be a dead end. In the land of kitsch we enter a simple and clear road thanks to which the reality is tamed and adapted to present needs and images. *But the character of modern society hideously exacerbates this curse: it reduces man's life to its social function; the history of a people to a small set of events that are themselves reduced to a tendentious interpretation; social life is reduced to political struggle (...)*<sup>17</sup>.

FEELING – a specific value that kitsch is based on and its entire tactics subordinated to. Its aim is to transform the recipient from a thinking creature into a feeling creature – somebody who prefers emotion to cognition. Feeling is kitsch's "weapon of mass destruction" aimed at crowds on political rallies, in cinema rooms and in front of TVs. The most effective way to move masses is to use archetypical images, strongly rooted in consciousness. Kitsch not only does not need to, but even does not have to be understood, it is enough that a person be moved. Subordination of mass media to the dictate of feeling makes their performances anti-intellectual or hysterical plane of short-term understanding and fusion of the "nation".

DICTIONARY – range of key notions, metaphors and images constituting the language of a given type of kitsch. To the dictionary of American kitsch Kundera adds for example such notions as "our traditional values" or "barbarism of communism". The existence of such a dictionary may be confirmed solely from a distance. Somebody who uses the language of kitsch is not aware of it.

Notion of the dictionary is the last one that seems necessary to grasp Kundera's understanding of kitsch and one that co-creates his original typology of the phenomenon. To sum up it is worth to point out that in the world created by the writer kitsch plays the role of an ominous power which rams all dimensions of protagonists' existence transforming some of them into puppets. It also crushed the cells of collective memory causing mass sclerosis in societies because history and tradition are values that kitsch is not able to digest.

### **Hallmarks of kitsch in *The Double Life of Veronique***

Since we admit that the scope of the phenomenon of kitsch goes beyond the area of the so-called junk we have to agree that apart from clear and easily recognisable kitsch there is also a good kitsch and even a brilliant one as a perfect imitation of art. However as much as it is easy to point to all missed attempts at imitating art it is much more difficult to find the opposite cases. In such situations kitsch transforms from a *gemütlichkeit* that causes us to smile with pity into a manifestation of religion of beauty full of deceptive charm. And it is from this perspective that we can speak about kitsch in the film of Krzysztof Kieślowski.

*The Double Life of Veronique* is a work in every respect subjected to the rule "work beautifully!". Reality is presented here through the filter of beauty thus making it an object of contemplation – we are not dealing here with cognition of new areas of reality but with aestheticisation of the one we already know and which is the easiest to aestheticise. Beauty as a dogma of the religion of kitsch – as opposed to the truth of art – does not refer us anywhere; its truth is an aesthetic truth, one devoid of content. When analysing this question Broch asked himself the question:

*does kitsch try to transform human life? The answer is simple: into a neurotic work of life, i.e. one which imposes a completely unreal convention on reality (...)*<sup>18</sup>. Unreal, that is inadequate and artificial because allowing us to escape from reality. Wishing to point to the elements of kitsch in *The Double Life of Veronique* we would have to in the first place emphasise the escapist character of this film. It is the escapism that I consider to be the main indicator of a work of kitsch which may be impeccably made, however, still aimed at escaping what Kundera correctly and bluntly called shit. Let us see in what way this escapism characteristic for kitsch manifests itself in the otherwise perfect audiovisual show that this late film by Kieślowski is. In order not to assume the safe role of a kitsch buster I will admit right at the beginning that as a teenage girl I saw *The Double Life of Veronique* a few times and I was absolutely enchanted by the charm of this film which – just as many of my peers – I considered to be a revelation. Today however I am not able to remember what in fact was the object of this revelation – the film about Weronika seen after years is like a vial from which the perfume has evaporated. A thirty-year-old woman clearly lacks this emotional predisposition that a teenage girl has – that is being interested in the first place in herself and not the world around her.

Let us start the analysis of the film from the level of its narrative. The function of aesthetic filter is performed here by the motive of the double life. The introduction of this motive allows us to place the experiences of protagonists in an effective frame equipping human life with the value of secret and transforming this life in accordance with an unreal convention which is aimed at its aestheticisation. The motive of double life is also a pretext to visualise and aestheticise the sphere of internal experiences manifesting themselves through premonitions which are the most important content of the protagonists' life under the dictate of feeling – one of the most important categories in Kundera's concept of kitsch. Thanks to the narrative structure based on the motive of double nature, presented events reveal the dimension of "spiritual depth" – thanks to the incessantly felt bond with the double every, even the most banal episode, is emphasised.

In the film by "working beautifully" a charming, ethereal and a bit somnambulist protagonist was created who within the presented world exists as an aesthetic fetish. She is a perfectly narcissistic figure – an object of cult of the religion of kitsch which allows us to turn back from the reality and run to a safe sphere of the internal life. The announcement of escape and radical clamping in the internal is contained already in the words adding a point to *The Decalogue* made two years before. *Everything is inside you* – this is the chorus of the rock song sung by Zbigniew Zamachowski which accompanies the credits to the last episode of the series. This chorus anticipates the optics present in *The Double Life of Veronique* which is an expression of individualistic model of Western spirituality that Broch wrote about trying to point to the genesis of kitsch. Making his film in 1991 Kieślowski turns away from familiar community and things that it experiences at the threshold of the decade. He escapes to the inside of Weronika. The transformation and historical and social changes accompanying it do not fit the scope of the director's interest – his new beautiful protagonist lives in a sterile world to which politics and history – just as Kundera's shit – have no access.

Polish Weronika comes from a small town emanating with the charm of an old province which – characteristically – is almost empty. This space is populated



*The Double Life of Veronique*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1991)

solely by beautiful choir singers, good-natured father of the protagonist and her loving boyfriend – strangely the society of the era of transformation has completely evaporated. Weronika is a figure living outside the indigestible for kitsch element of history and equally indigestible social element. A clear sign of this is one of the first scenes of the film taking place in a quiet backstreet of the town and showing a passionate kiss of the choir singer and her boyfriend. This closeness is for a moment disturbed by a truck passing – by taking away the Lenin’s monument. However the figure of the leader of the revolution rendered harmless is almost completely ignored by the protagonists – politics does not concern them and does not define them. Let us remember that we meet Weronika at the time when she abandons her family home and leaves to start a new stage of her life and take part in a vocal contest. From now on the plot takes place in the easily recognisable “magical” Krakow in which Weronika keeps meeting mysterious and eccentric figures – the miniature patron, the lady in a black hat and the exhibitionist dandy. Their appearance is strongly justified by the film’s dramaturgy aimed at the effect of strangeness and magic of urban spaces which they decorate. The selection of figures, events and places is decided in the first place by the level of their aesthetical attractiveness. Practicing of the religion of beauty manifests itself in the dogmatic subordination to the aesthetic imperative, an important confirmation of which is the image of confrontation of the Polish protagonist with her French double. It is at the same time the completion of the above-analysed scene of the kiss signalling the withdrawal from history and politics. We see Weronika walking across the Krakow market square from which all the aura of magic and mystery has disappeared due to a political manifestation. *So-viets go-home!* – rhythmically chants the crowd tamed by the militia. One of the participants of the “bovver” bumps into disoriented Weronika and knocks the notations out from her hands. Picking them up from the ground the girl notices a bus with a French group – finding her way towards it through the militia cordon she sees that among the excided foreigners with photo cameras there is her double. Unnoticed by the French Véronique Pole stands there speechless not paying any attention to the political events taking place around her – the premonition that accompanied her since childhood that she is not alone in the world has finally been confirmed. Events connected with the system transformation taking place around Weronika do not draw her attention at all and are not a revelation for her – the revelation is the meeting with her double. This is also supposed to attract the attention of the spectator undermining the weight of political demonstration which belongs to the indigestible for kitsch order of history. This way the world of the film gives in to the aesthetic imperative: what counts are Weronika’s experiences, premonitions and feelings that prove her internal beauty and not the violent and incomprehensible historical events which do not give in to aestheticisation and thus are driven out, symbolically pushed away to the second plane. At the same time the complexity and drama of changes accompanying the fall of communism are subject to the reduction characteristic for kitsch. It takes place through the suggestion that the French and Pole living at the threshold of the 1990s could be identical women who do not differ at all even though they grew up on two sides of the iron curtain. After its fall the meeting of the doubles took place, the doubles between whom there is a deep even though not entirely conscious bond and community of feeling – a picture not so much beautiful but

untrue because replacing a thorough analysis of differences resulting from long-term limitation of communication between Poland and Western countries with an effusive vision of spiritual unity. Undoubtedly this escapist vision had compensation power and helped to escape the most burning problems of the time consisting in the fact that Poland – after 50 years of being frozen in the communist system – significantly differed from the countries of Western Europe. The message of Kieślowski's film – “we are all the same” – at the time could have been credible solely for teenage girls.

Let us notice that it is difficult to create a comprehensive description of the figure of Weronika who is depicted not as a human being but aesthetic phenomenon existing thanks to the merger of three elements: light, music and acting creation of Irène Jacob. A number of tricks by Sławomir Idziak – the cinematographer for the movie – and the use of colour filters make it possible to create this unreal figure whose main attribute on the visual plane of the film is light. It follows her, plays with her, reflects from her body and underlines what is most beautiful in Weronika, visualising her sensitivity and delicateness. The young choir singer is not made from flesh and blood but created from light, and her singing lifts her to the level of complete exceptionality. *You have a strange voice* – says the head of the choir played by Kalina Jędrusik. The protagonist's vocal talent is quickly noticed in Krakow and her strange singing enchants the best experts. However Weronika uttering more and more piercing tones feels acute pain near her heart. After winning the contest she makes her debut in the Philharmonics – where during the performance of her solo part she suddenly dies.

If kitsch offers to its recipient contact with the world in which everything that exists undergoes aestheticisation, then a great example of it is the scene of Weronika's death – it repeats the pattern of depicting death in a popular melodrama analysed by Anna Martuszevska in reference to the top achievement of the literary kitsch that is *Trędowata (The Leper)* by Helena Mniszkówna. *Description of this death* – according to the researcher – *has been almost completely devoid of physiological elements, it lacks everything that could make the protagonist ugly in the eye of spectator. Hence her death from the realm of corporeality is moved to the realm of spirituality, “metaphysics”. It is elevated*<sup>19</sup>.

Weronika's death is the same. We have an impression that the choir singer dies because her delicate bodily cover cannot withstand the power of her talent and the scale of voice at the disposal of the “artistic soul” – for that reason death happens when she reaches the heights of her expressive possibilities. It is not physical descent but spiritual ascent – Weronika sings, camera goes mad, music thunders. And the spectator? The spectator forgets about himself for a moment, giving in to the impression that death can be a noble act coming in the most appropriate moment and in a very lofty setting: beautiful death of beautiful Weronika is a punch line of her beautiful life. Nothing disturbs the impressions which are pleasant for the eye, ear and spirit – the death scene is equally pleasant in perception as all the others. Dying with piercing singing on your lips – this is a classic motive of the art of kitsch which transposes the physical pain and brutality of death into a swan song of a young beauty.

Maria Poprzęcka notes that it is typical for kitsch to use motives whose appearance guarantees strong emotional resonance in the recipient. Death of young women next to misery of hurt children and secret murders is on a leading position



*The Double Life of Veronique*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1991)

in this set. And what is equally important, death depicted in Kieślowski's film is not final – even though Weronika dies, she lives on in the body of Véronique – her French double whose introduction neutralises death. Again aestheticism goes hand in hand with escapism. Their alliance causes that the place of true art trying to measure up with death is taken by aesthetic truth of kitsch encouraging us to escape into the film vision of “spiritual connection” of two identical girls.

The way Weronika's death is presented is an illustration of the “effect” technique typical for kitsch which in Kieślowski's film is mastered to perfection. The scene of pre-death swan song is supposed in the first place to give aesthetic pleasure. The mechanism of functioning of the “effect” technique may be successfully described by reference to the rules governing kitsch introduced by Abraham Moles. In reference to the scene of the protagonist's death we may talk about the rule of accumulation and synesthetic perception. The first is manifested here by the condensation of means of expression which are maximally used. Both in the sphere of the image and the sound we are dealing with intensification of the message – incredibly expressive music full of pathos is accompanied by dizzying dynamics of subsequent frames, changing of the camera's points of view, camera's great mobility. It leads to the impression that images are “spinning”, this is intensified by the increasing power of musical expression. Disturbing mood of secrecy, so far built successively, this way is rapidly accumulated and additionally enhanced by the exceptionality of the event itself which is the sudden, highly dramatic death of the protagonist. This overwhelming message constitutes a simultaneous attack on the spectator's sight and hearing who is to get involved in the reception of the film to the fullest extent. Under the pressure of aesthetic stimuli, however, the meaning as such is lost and in consequence the protagonist's death does not cause in the spectators a sense of grief but the sense of spiritual elevation. Power of aesthetic impact deafens the sense of the entire event.

When explaining the way the rule of accumulation and synaesthesia functions, Moles refers to the Wagnerian idea of total art. The same example is used by Broch when speaking about the existence of brilliant kitsch. The above analogy lets us draw certain conclusions as to the way of creation of film kitsch. Let us underline the fact that in purely formal terms the film is in a way a fulfilment of the synthesis of arts postulated by Wagner. The polyphony of means of expression innate to it – affecting spectators through image, word, sound, music and rhythm – constitutes a great base for the occurrence of art that the German creator thought about. Let us also remember that in his opinion a common, basic feature of all arts was rhythm. The latter from the perspective of film art is, as we know, of a fundamental meaning. Characteristic for the film condensation of means decides on the one hand about its attractiveness as compared to other arts, on the other hand however in a special way, exposes it to the risk of becoming kitsch, which may be not only a common junk but a trap of hyper-aestheticism consisting precisely of love of aesthetic values and practicing – according to Broch – earthly religion of beauty. Its existence is according to the writer a consequence of the process of laicisation and rejection of the transcendental God that has its origins in the Enlightenment. In consequence of this process in the Western culture a new, individualistic and thoroughly lay model of spirituality appeared whose modern manifestation we can notice in *The Double Life of Veronique*. One of the forms of this lay spirituality is the attitude of gushiness connected with kitsch in one of its most refined forms.

We can talk about kitsch as the religion of beauty using two categories: hyper-aestheticism or spiritual exaltation. The functioning of the first of them I have discussed when talking about the part of the film that regards the life of the Polish Weronika. Now we have to look at the second part concerning the figure of the French Véronique.

Apart from the notion of the religion of beauty Broch uses the notion of the religion of reason resulting from the ideas started by the French revolution. After the dethronement of God, mind was enthroned and in consequence the so-called spiritual needs of a man were pushed aside to the second plane. This order was destroyed for some time by Romanticism. The need for spiritual exaltation and corresponding effusive imagination was widespread due to the mediocre version of Romanticism in which Broch sees the source of kitsch. Typical for the world view of the era, ennoblement of the emotional sphere was quickly absorbed and transformed into kitsch. Then the mirror of Romantic kitsch started to reflect a man whose value was to be decided by his “internal wealth”. In love with his soul he looked for absolute values in it, in a way worshipping its feelings.

The figure of Véronique may be treated as a creation of modern exalted imagination. *Listening to the voice of her soul* she lives convinced that she is not alone in the world. For that reason when her Polish counterpart dies, Véronique feels sudden anxiety, unjustified internal commotion and sorrow. This incomprehensible impulse tells her to give up her promising career – of course that of a singer. For the protagonist following her internal voice is something natural even when it pushes her towards completely incomprehensible decisions. Her behaviour is not governed by mind but emotional imperative which is explained by the existence of the other Weronika. Various premonitions, dreams and signals gnawing Véronique come precisely from her double. We realise that somewhere deep in

their souls without their knowledge important communication takes place. External void surrounding Véronique is compensated this way by the wealth of internal experiences which say to her: *You are not alone!*

Similarly to her Polish predecessor Véronique has an impression she is a creature who has little to do with reality. Episode that is to make her image a bit more authentic is her involvement in a friend's divorce case. Even Kieślowski himself admitted that attempts to eliminate this episode caused that (...) *the protagonist did not walk on earth at all; she floated above it. For her only the soul, premonition and magic existed. So I had to come back to the divorce motive in order to bring Véronique down to earth. Make her a normal human being. This trick fulfilled its task. However this motive in the film is artificial. But maybe at least for a moment the spectator feels that she could be a friend, a neighbour, that she is simply a person who daydreams all the time*<sup>20</sup>. In fact – the role of a divorce witness is completely incompatible with the image of the protagonist. The subordination to the unreal and the exalted does not tolerate any exceptions from the adopted way of telling the story. Véronique as a creation of effusive imagination may not be somebody else at the same time.

I have already mentioned that the effusive 19<sup>th</sup> century imagination drew from appropriately transposed values of Romanticism. Taking into the account its modern form, on the one hand we can speak about the continuation of the Romantic model and on the other certain new influences can be seen. If the attitude of spiritual exaltation constitutes a negation of the rationalised, cold view of reality, then from this perspective *The Double Life of Veronique* may be seen as an unintended illustration of the concepts promoted by the New Age movement. Kieślowski's film was an offer meeting the spiritual needs of a modern recipient. Hence "new" style, "new" topic and finally corresponding to them "new" spirituality moving with times in which Kundera's terminal paradoxes started to gain voice with increasing clarity.

In the case of *The Double Life...* this lay metaphysics which is usually mentioned in reference to the spiritual message of the film may be successfully identified with historical metaphysics promoted by the followers of the Age of Aquarius. This is how this new philosophy of man and world is described by Michel Lacroix: *The Age of Aquarius announces itself as a period of harmony and reconciliation of opposites. (...) The problem of unity fits the comprehensive vision called holism or holistic paradigm (from Greek "holos" – everything). It says that the physical and spiritual worlds are not separate parts but a homogenous reality. (...) We could say that the image of reality depends on modification of the field of view. At the level of phenomena division rules, but after small adjustment of the perception apparatus the unity becomes apparent. Man is not a separate being from his neighbours any more. The concept of God changes since deity loses the character of separate and transcendental reality: God melts with men. Diversity is replaced by merger. Loneliness loses its sense, past and future merge, even death is defeated*<sup>21</sup>.

Holistic metaphysics of New Age comes from the conviction about the panpsychic nature of reality which is governed by one common mind joining all the elements into one. Everything thinks, everything feels and everything is able to communicate due to what the matter in fact is immaterial. In accordance with these ideas it is necessary to change the way of perception of a human being resulting from the assumption that: *modern man (especially a Western man) is sick – sick due to his isolation. He tore bonds connecting him with neighbours and the world*

and his awareness was closed within ego which looks for shelter on “lonely islands”. Crippled and ossified soul needs treatment<sup>22</sup>. This sick man of the West willing to perform the healing transformation of his personality should realise the existence of the phenomenon of “trans-personalisation”. Faith in its existence is one of the ways to come out of the state of isolation. Trans-personalisation means unlimited identification of an individual with all things and beings in the universe as a result of internal self-cognition.

Do the above concepts not constitute a convincing context for interpretation of *The Double Life of Veronique*? Confrontation of the film with the worldview of the New Age makes us see it as a “product of its times” – since we are dealing here with the phenomenon of trans-personalisation inscribed into the holistic and panpsychic image of reality.

Trans-personalisation takes place between Weronika and Véronique. The women are identical because the world is a unity. They are not each others’ doubles; their coexistence proves rather the annihilation of diversity of beings for the benefit of a merger. Having modified the field of vision, Véronique starts to sense the operation of this merger understanding at the same time that the conviction about the existence of “somebody else” in her life is not an illusion. Death of Weronika which is only feigned since she lives on in the person of Véronique takes place as a result of trans-personalisation. Death and loneliness are defeated through the spiritual self-cognition and unification with other beings.

Everything thinks, feels and sends information – going by train to Krakow, Weronika looks at the world through a glass ball and sees in it the “deeper” dimension of reality. The same extraordinary image of the world seen through a thick glass will be later seen by Véronique in her dream. When in the film finale she touches a tree trunk she brings out the music heard every time when the above-mentioned panpsychic communication takes place. Thanks to it also Véronique’s father will hear the sounds playing in the tree trunk. The scope of the communication in the depicted world seems cosmic – both the stars and small, fragile leaves contemplated by the protagonists in the initial sequence of the film participate in it.

*The Double Life of Veronique* seen today appears to be a symptomatic creation of its time – a film which contains the material helpful in answering the question posed by Anna Sobolewska in her book *Mapy duchowe współczesności, czyli co nam zostało z Nowej Ery*<sup>23</sup>. In the first place, however, the analysis of this film allows us to point to the notions which create the dictionary of good quality kitsch defined by hyper-aestheticism, spiritual exaltation and escapism, that is everything that is contained in the notion introduced by Hermann Broch of the religion of beauty. Despite his alarmist diagnosis I do not think that this is a dangerous kitsch – the very fact that we are able to identify it and analyse it critically means that the awareness of kitsch today is much better than in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today kitsch is rather used than experienced, we allow ourselves to try various styles of participation in culture which offers both junk treats and effusive aesthetic ascents in the form of the film by Krzysztof Kieślowski.

AGNIESZKA MORSTIN

Translated by AMALIA WOŹNA

- <sup>1</sup> M. Poprzęcka, *Złoty wiek złej sztuki*, in: eadem, *O złej sztuce*, Warszawa 1998, pp. 204-245.
- <sup>2</sup> See H. Broch, *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch*, in: *Kitsch: An Anthology of Bad Taste*, ed. G. Dorfler, Universe Books, New York 1969.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 63.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.
- <sup>5</sup> See M. Poprzęcka, op. cit., pp. 161-205.
- <sup>6</sup> H. Broch, op. cit., p. 55.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 56.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.
- <sup>10</sup> Delivering his lecture *Notes on the Problem of Kitsch* Hermann Broch said: *It is not mere chance that Hitler (like his predecessor Wilhelm II) was enthusiastic disciple of kitsch. He liked the full-bodied. He lived among bloody kitsch and loved kitsch sweet as saccharin and the saccharine type.* *Ibidem*, p. 65.
- <sup>11</sup> See D. Ugrešić, *Sweet Strategies*, in: eadem, *The Culture of Lies*, transl. C. Hawkesworth, Orion House, London 1999, pp. 47-86.
- <sup>12</sup> H. Broch, op. cit., p. 49.
- <sup>13</sup> A. Moles, *Psychologie du kitsch*, Denoël, Paris 1977, quoted after the Polish edition: idem, *Kicz, czyli sztuka szczęścia. Studium o psychologii kiczu*, transl. A. Szczepańska, E. Wende, Warszawa 1978, p. 218.
- <sup>14</sup> M. Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, transl. L. Asher, Grove Press, London 1988, p. 163.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, transl. M. H. Hein, Harper&Row, New York 1984, p. 248.
- <sup>16</sup> M. Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, op. cit., p. 41.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- <sup>18</sup> H. Broch, op. cit., p. 63.
- <sup>19</sup> A. Martuszczyńska, *Wniebowzięcie heroiny*, in: eadem, *Ta trzecia. Problemy literatury popularnej*, Gdańsk 1997, p. 72.
- <sup>20</sup> K. Kieślowski, *O sobie*, Kraków 1997, p. 144.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Lacroix, *L'Idéologie du New Age*, Flammarion, Paris 1996, quoted after the Polish edition: idem, *Ideologia New Age*, transl. M. Gałuszka, Katowice 1999, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.
- <sup>23</sup> See. A. Sobolewska, *Mapy duchowe współczesności, czyli co nam zostało z Nowej Ery*, Warszawa 2009.

## TOWARDS THE DOCUMENTARY



*Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising*, dir. Tadeusz Makarczyński (1983)

# On the Impossibility of Believing in the Documentary

Dariusz Jabłoński's *Photographer*

TOMASZ ŁYSAK

Let us concentrate first on the meaning of the word “document”. It suggests that it is possible to record reality “as it is in fact”. Unfortunately, it takes a brief moment to realise that documents can be forged and even those which have not been tampered with can ideologically distort facts. What is more, documents translate a complicated event into a preconceived form. They rely on an internal logic incomprehensible to non-bureaucrats. In a way, documents provide a novel description of the world serving specific goals, but – and there is no doubt about it – they are made in order to be perceived as a genuine record of the past (even forging documents is meant to convince us to believe this or that version of events). In the case of the Holocaust, documents both reveal and obscure what happened. They facilitate reconstruction of the fate of individuals (paradoxically, due to the fact that they were not perceived as individuals), at the same time posing a mystery as to the intentions of their authors. Even if we think of bureaucrats as tiny cogs in the machinery of annihilation, there is a nagging question: what type of people could calculate income and deaths in a single document? The answer is hard to swallow as we would easily recognise their motives as our own. Some of them were art lovers, found delight in music, were preoccupied with their own career, etc.

The word “document” is by no means reserved solely for different genres of paper work. In common parlance, we call photography “a document” of what happened, and film footage is understood in a similar manner. In Polish the word “document” is used interchangeably with the phrase “documentary film”. Historically the changing understanding of testifying to reality affected the reception and production of documentary films. In some periods staging was used while preparing to shoot (e.g. in Robert Flaherty’s famous films <sup>1</sup>) whereas later any interference with the recorded material was totally frowned upon. This second school is known as *cinema verité* and in essence is the philosophy of non-intervention in the filmed material, while a filmmaker is said to adopt the vantage point of “a fly on the wall”. The prolonged domination of films recorded under this convention came to an end as documentaries inevitably relied on the basic elements of film art such as takes or editing while the pretence of accurately representing reality was to a large extent naïve <sup>2</sup>. “Deconstructing the myth” rehabilitated certain techniques of understanding, among others, interviews with talking heads and placing the visual in the narrative context. Additionally, semiotics and deconstruction proved that there is no

stable and irrefutable relation between the image and its meaning. These perspectives point to the necessity of finding a context for understanding and tying the process of understanding to the audience. Director Dariusz Jabłoński (*Fotoamator*, distributed internationally as *Photographer*, 1998) strives to add the historical and human context to an unknown image of the extermination.

Colour slides from the Łódź ghetto (called Litzmanstadt during the occupation) discovered in Vienna in 1987 have significantly enriched the iconography of the Holocaust<sup>3</sup>. There are abundant graphic representations of the Shoah (Marianne Hirsch claims that the numerous archives hold approximately 2 million photographs from the period<sup>4</sup>), but only a few images – severed from their historical context – have left their imprint in the collective memory. It suffices to mention photographs of the gate of Auschwitz with the famous slogan *Arbeit macht frei*, the railway spur in Birkenau with its merging tracks, or the bulldozer operated by a British soldier pushing corpses into a mass grave after the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Disassociating the above-mentioned representations from their concrete historical reality serves the needs of postmemory, which is the only option available to those who do not know the Holocaust from their own experience but through familial or cultural representations. Postmemory – due to a limited number of constantly repeated images – can be organized around concrete visuals. This has been the case of the gate at Auschwitz I, which became a universally recognised symbol of the Holocaust, even though for the majority of prisoners it was not the true gate to the world of Auschwitz. What is more, later on it no longer served as the entrance to the camp as the latter's enlargement placed it inside the concentrationary complex.

In the overwhelming majority of cases Holocaust photographs were taken by the perpetrators and reflect their point of view. In reference to these images it is legitimate to compare the photographic lens to the barrel of a gun<sup>5</sup>, as both cases entail an intention to suddenly and irreversibly freeze life (the motif of double death – adopted in Holocaust studies from studies on slavery – refers to the already sealed fate of every victim, doomed to destruction even before their execution took place). The double death of the photographed transpired, not infrequently, at the very moment of execution<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, the victims were forced to pose either in the standardised, mugshot manner for the identification documents or prior to execution. The photographs were also taken by Jews themselves, including at such improbable locations as the cremation pyres manned by the Sonderkommando in Birkenau. These documentary efforts made under threat of death provide a new type of Holocaust representation as the perpetrators' tunnel vision is being exposed in the photographs of their Jewish victims. The perpetrators did not stop at the production of the images as they were part of the planned audience for such representations (it is they who are the addressees of these images and not the survivors or, even less us, the postwar generation). Marianne Hirsch sees a proof of this phenomenon in a photograph of German soldiers who, in the wake of a pacification operation, look at photographs taken during a previous action. Such compulsive documentation can be linked to German pride felt in participating in the masterplan, whose aim was to "free the world of the Jews" and for this reason alone had to be recorded. The victims were not only deprived of their lives but also the possibility of creating their own representations and preserving existing documents. The production of

images was to be the sole domain of the “master race” as well as their interpretation and reception.

“The most glorious success in the history of Germany” – making the world *judenrein*, that is, free of the Jews – necessitated radical steps. German representations break almost every imaginable taboo <sup>7</sup>, but the passage of time and exposure to other disturbing images has deadened our sensitivity. These images fail to invoke the horror felt by twelve year old Susan Sontag (in 1945) or nine year old Amy Kaplan (who found her father’s camp photographs in a drawer in 1968). Sontag was right to point out that photographs can undergo a process of desensitisation and even the most upsetting, when frequently seen, stop causing moral angst <sup>8</sup>. This is probably the reason why we are so moved by the colour slides made in the Łódź ghetto by Walter Genewein. Their novelty value consists not only in enriching our perspective on the past with two aspects: colour (understood as something more than a technological possibility) and the gaze of an executioner’s middleman, a man who did not kill anybody, occupied with the “mere” bookkeeping of a Holocaust enterprise. There is another aspect too.

The discovery of the colour slides from the ghetto challenges our perception of the past – we automatically expect black-and-white film stock or prints for this period. This choice is not just limited to representations from the period (due to technological limitations), as contemporary artists have also made a conscious choice to eschew colour (the black-and-white medium has been utilised by Art Spiegelman in *Maus*, Steven Spielberg in *Schindler’s List* and Henry Bean in *The Believer* – but in the latter only in wartime flashbacks). For some critics, linking the Holocaust to colour is as bad as linking it to humour (these are two reasons for levelling criticism at Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful*). Furthermore, colour is linked to processes of aesthetisation, that is, a translation of the extermination into the language of aesthetics despite the anti-aesthetic qualities of the genocide. Additionally, before the final victory of colour in the history of cinema it was reserved for films depicting fairy lands, while black-and-white stock placed the film in a concrete historical reality <sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, wartime German colour feature films shirked representations of the situation on the front and deployed such genres as *historical costume films or escapist melodramas/musical comedies* <sup>10</sup>.

In the interwar period there were two competing understandings of documentary film: firstly, Hollywood’s offerings – which can be dubbed “for entertainment” as products were sold in sets (a documentary, newsreel and feature) – which made documentary films just another tool of amusement, and secondly, those films focused on showing social inequalities or the horrors of war (which did not shy away from showing disturbing scenes recorded by the camera). Walter Genewein’s choice did not happen in an aesthetic vacuum; however, when compared with images produced by Nazi soldiers (when talking about Genewein I prefer to use the moniker “an ordinary German”), his slides stand out as being full of restraint or oozing an idyllic atmosphere.

Jabłoński’s film starts in colour as if taking heed of Genewein. An elderly man speaks in an archive, claiming that he sees the ghetto in the colour slides, but it is by no means the ghetto etched in his memory. He asks what he is to trust: Walter Genewein’s photographs or his own memory? The same streets and houses are visible, but he fails to comprehend the meaning of the colours. This question is of key

importance for the present interpretation of the film as it sheds light on the mechanisms of memory but also the production and reception of representations of the Final Solution. After a brief colour contemporary introduction the film switches to black-and-white. We observe cobblestones in close-up for a prolonged moment but at the end of the shot the camera tracks towards the survivor Arnold Mostowicz. From now on black-and-white and colour images alternate. The façade of a tenement house in a colour slide is followed by a late-1990s shot on black-and-white stock. Jabłoński's documentary is an example of a trend in documentaries of turning to historical colour footage of the war in the late 1990s<sup>11</sup>. The predominant black-and-white footage of the past has been replaced with the equivalent colour stock, and sometimes colour images of the past have no black-and-white equivalent<sup>12</sup>. One thing that is very interesting is that these two types of stock differed in their distribution patterns because colour footage was frequently recorded for private purposes on either 8 or 16mm film with no intention of being released to the general public.

Walter Genewein communicates with the audience only through mediated messages. The first time he identifies himself is in a letter to AGFA, the film company, in which he asks as "an experienced photo enthusiast" for colour positives to better render "the achievements of his post". Arnold Mostowicz provides a counterpoint to Genewein's voice over (obviously it is not an archival recording, but a German actor reading out the letter – this device is to enhance realism). The survivor admits that for him the ghetto was something unreal, uncanny, something beyond imagination. Both protagonists introduce themselves from the postwar perspective: Genewein in a letter from prison, in which he pleads for release due to ill health (we learn this only towards the end of the film), and Mostowicz after more than 50 years. Genewein identifies himself: "I'm an Austrian, Catholic, I have a wife and children, I want to say that the ghetto was not a concentration camp but a small Jewish town". This introduction clearly demonstrates that he was conscious of the horror of the extermination and started to comprehend what he participated in or, conversely, that he failed to grasp it, but used the post-Nuremberg distinction between concentration camps and ghettos, or death camps and labour camps. Mostowicz claims that he served as a doctor in the ghetto, but due to failing health he quit his practice after the war and became a journalist and a writer instead. This is the starting point for two parallel narratives in the film: Genewein's professional advancement and survival as a doctor, as he testifies to the destruction of the "Jewish city" (which initially had as many as 320,000 inhabitants). The accountant commenced his career in Łódź in July 1940 after having been summoned from Berlin. This history is similar to the stories of many other "ordinary Germans" (to borrow a phrase from Christopher Browning or Daniel Johan Goldhagen). At that time, this was his prime – he was climbing the professional ladder, implementing the ideals of the bureaucratic state. For the survivor this story hardly resembles a tale of success. Mostowicz narrates his story from the shade, talking about the longest shadow in his life, from which he is still trying to extricate himself.

The Łódź ghetto was established as a production plant for the German army and civilian purposes. Economic considerations were the rationale for the existence of the closed Jewish district, which was the longest operating ghetto in Europe occupied by Germany. An official document describing work conditions illustrates the fact that the ghetto had been perceived in economic terms – working Jews re-

ceived double food rations which had to be eaten in the workshop in order to rule out embezzlement such as “giving food to family members”. Additionally, subordinating physiology to production led to the blotting out of family ties. Alienation took place on all levels, Jewish workers were not only alienated from their bodies (which were tools for the benefit of the Reich), but also from their own families (David Sierakowiak’s diary – a chronicle of hunger disease and its detrimental impact on the strength of family ties – illustrates such estrangement <sup>13</sup>).

The incorporation of the inhabitants of the Jewish district into the plan of total exploitation and annihilation comes to the fore in Mostowicz’s anecdote. The event seems uncanny to him. It probably took place in November 1943, early one morning. Entering a horse-drawn cab, he heard a noise as if somebody was striking a hammer on the cobblestones. Suddenly, two groups of people emerged where two streets crossed, their clogs clattering on the stones on their way to work. This anecdote lays bare the mechanisms of how memory works. Mostowicz fails to remember the location of the event, but recalls such details as the fact that the horse moved its nostrils on hearing the sound of the clogs.

The economic success of the ghetto was linked to Chaim Rumkowski – the Elder of the Jewish Council in Łódź. Rumkowski, just like the Germans, can be heard in voice over. Adopting the Nazi perspective, bent on production, he speaks about a disgraceful aspect of life in the ghetto – that is to say, crime. This pronouncement is juxtaposed with a slide from the ghetto and an audio recording of a sentence handed down for stealing four potatoes from outside the fence by hooking them with a piece of wire. According to this verdict, avoiding death from starvation amounted to a criminal act. The evidence for the internalisation of the German perspective shocks when compared with a verdict passed by the Jewish court in conjunction with an official report by a German gendarme who shot a Jewish woman for the attempted theft of a turnip from a passing horse-drawn carriage. Firing two bullets was called “fulfilment of official duties”.

The experiences of the ghetto are difficult to convey after the war, but even during the occupation the horror of the situation did not strike everybody with the same force. Mostowicz talks about rich Western European Jews who came to the ghetto as if for a picnic, totally oblivious to the gravity of the situation. They invited each other from one bunk bed to another as if their social standing had not changed, and shared food. Their obliviousness mirrors somehow the naivete of the accountant’s colour slides, devoid of pathos, while the idyllic in the images is seldom disturbed by the drama of death. If I were to look for exceptions to this rule, I could mention a hairdresser’s face with his “obituary” written on it (we owe credit to Rachel Auerbach for the use of the word “klepsydra”, that is, obituary, in her diary from the Warsaw ghetto) – a sign of death from starvation. This face is shown in close-up until it becomes just a blur.

In all probability, we cannot speak of Genewein’s naivete but of a specific way of seeing the world, a specific interpretation underlying his slides. Perhaps, efforts at documentation relate to a totally different facet of life under the occupation. Slides taken at an exhibition of commodities produced by workshops <sup>14</sup> located in the ghetto reflect pride derived from a properly managed enterprise <sup>15</sup>. A similar pride can be seen in a document signed by Genewein, relating to the museum of Jewish production (it is fitting to highlight the role of the verbal commentary that accompanies the most



*Photographer*, dir. Dariusz Jabłoński (1998)

frequently presented photograph; it seems that the language of the quoted documents aptly characterises Genewein’s way of thinking. Furthermore, we can assume that they also reflect his intentions as a photographer)<sup>16</sup>. The documentary juxtaposes the amount of produced goods with the production costs – deportation statistics for six months. Simultaneously, Genewein relates the changes in the manner of accounting as the soaring productivity of the workshops has called for a more effective way of bookkeeping. These two pieces of information contribute to the narrative context of the images, placing them in the highly rationalised social reality, where factors such as profit and accounting are more important than any translation of the figure from the “costs” column into ethical categories.

Hiding or obscuring the truth could be observed among the Jews, too. Mostowicz informs us that workers sorting clothes in the ghetto did not want to face the truth, even when they were busy sorting clothes belonging to their relatives, who had been sent to Chełmno (Kulmhof) to die in the mobile gas chambers<sup>17</sup>. This resistance to knowledge persisted despite the early circulation of information about the death camps. Mostowicz addresses the filmmaker standing behind the camera. Such an address to the listener or the viewer stems from the realisation that telling the truth is impossible in the absence of a well-defined audience.

The accountant’s narrative is interwoven with letters to AGFA inquiring about the unrealistic rendition of colours in the slides. Colours have shifted towards brown and red, and finally just red. Students of Freud would automatically turn to the notion of the uncanny<sup>18</sup>, that is, an event or phenomenon which has a rational explanation, but its appearance leads to the suspension of rationality. If somebody believes in the correspondence between the real world and its hidden dimension, they can claim that Genewein’s slides “see” more than he does. In a way, they destroy the excessive optimism of the accountant’s world while he sensibly demands the removal of the faulty vision by the manufacturer of the photosensitive material. He asks why whites have turned pinkish and other colours have gained a reddish hue. There are a few letters to AGFA, which testifies to his high expectations of the photographs taken – he expects a truthful rendering of the world. He believes in photography understood as an indisputable record of reality. This wish prompts a question: “What is the reality Genewein believes in?” Is he an adherent of Nazi ideology? Or an “ordinary” man working diligently regardless of the prevailing social system?

AGFA replies that the misrepresentation of colours was due to technological problems which have already been rectified ruling out their repetition in the future; they also ask him to send the outstanding payment. This exchange of letters provides an instrumental answer to an instrumental question. Technology shuns mystery and tolerates no understatements. Furthermore, technology is meant to provide profit. For the manufacturer of the positive film it does not matter what happens to be in front of the lens as the ultimate goal is to offer a product which will satisfy customers' demand for an unquestionable image of the world "as it is".

The Łódź ghetto can be understood in terms of profits produced for the German military and civilians but also, as Mostowicz is right to point out, many Germans (both civilians and soldiers) blessed the existence of the Jewish district as it offered employment protecting them from transfer to the eastern front. Unfortunately for the inhabitants of the ghetto, the Nazi extermination frenzy did not lose its impetus despite the military defeats on all fronts, resulting in the liquidation of the ghetto on 25th August, 1944.

Towards the end of the film Genewein pleads for parole due to ill health, arguing that prison rations make it impossible to keep to his diet (he is a diabetic). The letter reappears – it is quoted in the opening of the film when Genewein denied the ghetto the status of a concentration camp. Regarding the letter, we can doubt his intentions (he claims to have been imprisoned after being denounced by an "unfriendly informer"), but our reservations might be too harsh. Probably, like numerous Nazi war criminals, he does not question what has happened, but is blind to a causal relationship between his work in the ghetto and the genocide. Between the lines we can read his acknowledgement of Nazi crimes (he mentions concentration camps, however, they are seen as the total opposite of his own experience, something to protect him from responsibility).

Before the final credits we see short biographies of the main protagonists in white lettering on a black background – Hans Biebow (commandant of the Łódź ghetto) was sentenced to death and hanged; Chaim Rumkowski – probably burned alive with his family in the crematorium in Auschwitz-Birkenau; Arnold Mostowicz – a doctor and a writer living in Warsaw (died on 3rd February, 2002); Walter Genewein died a respected citizen in 1974. It seems that his postwar life had not necessitated a radical change from him, he remained as conscientious and law-abiding a citizen (in his own understanding and in the eyes of German society) as he had been during the war. Had it not been for the slides from the ghetto, we would never have heard of this "ordinary accountant".

Let us consider the methods of testifying to reality adopted by Dariusz Jabłoński. The juxtaposition of colour slides and black-and-white stock shows that seeing catastrophe in colour is out of place and provokes intuitive resistance. Black-and-white stock is by no means archive material (it depicts Łódź in the second half of the 1990s). Arnold Mostowicz offers a guided tour of the archive. This device brings to mind the subtitle to Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*<sup>19</sup>, with a claim that only a witness can have access to these terrible events (in part because it is impossible to usurp their position. He/she cannot even be sure of their own memory or senses. Additionally, they may encounter difficulties expressing their experiences). This uncertainty surfaces when Mostowicz recites lyrics of a song about Rumkowski – his story starts with a seemingly

automatic recall of the lyrics, only then does he move to events from the ghetto or introduces himself. Mostowicz is a special witness as his medical practice gave him access to information about the ghetto. What is more, he is aware that this practice was tied (or should have been) to higher moral standards. This awareness has informed Mostowicz's postwar life, highlighted in a story about a meeting called by Rumkowski in order to consult the ghetto's doctors about the decision to deport 24,000 children from the ghetto (without a shadow of a doubt, the Germans were not interested in the opinion of the Jewish council, they demanded consent). Rumkowski managed to lower this number to 20,000 and asked the doctors about the proposed course of action. The majority of doctors admitted that the German request should be complied with and the children sent away. A few people protested while the rest abstained. At this point, Mostowicz poses a rhetorical question, anticipating a potential inquiry about his own stance: "You could ask me now what I had done". He admits to not having uttered a word. He tries looking for extenuating circumstances (knowing all too well that there is no justification): none of his relatives was in the Łódź ghetto and the case had no personal dimension to him. At a critical point in his narrative he points to the camera operator, searching for an audience willing to take pains to comprehend his position in the ghetto at the time.

There had been events which pierced the protective psychic shield. The ex-doctor regards the letter sent by his father from the Warsaw ghetto as the most painful event of the war. In the letter he is rebuked for an unemotional account of the death of his father's beloved brother and having forsaken family feelings. When Mostowicz received the letter from his father, the latter was already dead. Despite the fact that the doctor kept filling in death certificates for family members in Łódź and was convinced that everybody was bound to die, he cannot stop thinking how much he hurt his father (despite his best intentions).

The juxtaposition of black-and-white footage with colour stock can be traced throughout the history of documentary film. I have Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* in mind, in which black-and-white archival material from the concentration camps was juxtaposed with colour footage recorded in the lush green surroundings of a former concentration camp. The difference lies in the fact that the documents presented by Jabłoński are in colour, which is at odds with our habits of perception<sup>20</sup>. As a consequence of this decision other documents from the period are also shown on colour stock, e.g. daily newspapers. Their ontological status is equated to the colour slides. This device is discontinued after the liquidation of the ghetto – at this point black-and-white identification photographs appear (for *Kennkarten*) with stamps on their borders. The photographs stand in for the people who perished, but they were already sentenced to die at the moment of photographing (by means of deindividualisation and being branded with their ethnicity). On the other hand, when these photographs are shown outside of their context (not as a part of an ID card), they counterbalance the optimism of Genewein's pictures. Both types of representation freeze life, but the accountant overlooks vital aspects of life in the ghetto (his photostory is a narrative of personal and collective success as Genewein belongs to a different interpretive community than the postwar audience and the Jews from Łódź sentenced to extermination). There is a pressing need to provide context as the images are not going to tell us any story without being incorporated into a narrative. Without it, the people in both sets of photographs would remain com-

pletely anonymous, severed from their historicity and concreteness. Jabłoński's endeavour is to provide a historical and personal context in order to "disenchant" otherwise incomprehensible images.

I would like to employ Raul Hilberg's historical diagnosis<sup>21</sup> as a context for understanding (or being unable to comprehend) the accountant's motifs. Hilberg stresses that Holocaust perpetrators were not simple or crazy but well-educated. Their actions were not aberrations but an implementation of the mechanisms of civilisation that applied thorough control over social reality. Seen in this light, Genewein differs from the SS officers or Wehrmacht soldiers, but probably due to the fact that he was sent to supervise the finances of the ghetto and not to carry out "special tasks" or front-line duties. His aesthetic perception of the world irritates our understanding of history; it is *easier* for us to understand the joy of soldiers after mass executions than to comprehend images devoid of any horror. The need to confront such images is unavoidable as the viewers, saturated with images of violence, have lost their ability to feel shock. This aesthetic camouflage is the visual manifestation of the negligible distance between contemporary viewers and the photographer from the ghetto. His love for photography mimics our love of snapshots, which consciously avoid any unpleasant or disturbing topics. They serve to maintain a positive self-image of the family and undergo self-censorship<sup>22</sup>.

Bauman stresses the rational character of the Holocaust<sup>23</sup>, excluding it from an age-old sequence of pogroms. He claims that it is the complete opposite of the *Kristallnacht*, which was an isolated explosion of irrational hatred. Reliance on feelings could not have guaranteed genocide. The true meaning of modern genocide consists in the thorough, administrative elimination of emotions and application of pure rationality. This rationality belongs to gardening culture (with a high degree of goal-orientation). Modern culture nominates itself as a gardener, identifying individuals to be eliminated in order to prepare the ground for the ideal society of the future. Unwanted people were not killed out of hatred, but because they ceased to perform a useful function in the world image. This is the reason why Genewein could ignore the high death rate in the "costs" column (as well as the necessity for further deportations).

According to Bauman, the Holocaust constitutes the triumph of civilisation over animal instincts and not the coming of the beast (this myth is due to the Western myth of progress). Such a model of civilisation led to a substantial suppression of personal aggression. Furthermore, Bauman correctly describes the tiny cogs in the machinery of destruction – such as Genewein. He demonstrates that they were guided by technical responsibility while rejecting the issue of moral responsibility. Occupying a middle position in the hierarchy, Genewein turned the exploitation and destruction of the Jewish population into statistical categories – the only ones comprehensible to modern bureaucrats. Unable to ethically assess his professional actions, he did not apply moral categories to picture taking. While not a direct perpetrator, he took photographs from a specific cognitive distance. It would be a mistake to expect him to empathise with the inhabitants of the ghetto, on the other hand, generic scenes recorded on positive film do not bring to mind the metaphor of the lens being the barrel of a gun.

The last slide from the collection discovered in Vienna has been catalogued as No. 393 and shows a Jewish bathhouse. The concentration of a multitude of naked

bodies in a small space evokes inescapable associations, but it is an image in which people wanted to believe and were made to believe. This image connotes gas chambers (this truth was hidden from the victims led to their deaths in order to avoid panic). It seems that an unavoidable association with a gas chamber refers to an image which does not exist (a few representations break this taboo, but most representations known to me observe it – e.g. *Schindler's List*). The photograph discards the idyllic version of the Łódź ghetto only by virtue of the knowledge of historical context. Without the audience this fragment of the film would prove incomprehensible as they are being sensitised to the realities of the closed district.

Let us return to Walter Genewein's concern with the proper rendition of colour in his slides – we can recognise our own aesthetic concerns. The contemporary obsession with the monstrous is absent in these images. He did not have the intention of photographing nightmares (in this respect he was different from executioners who found delight in being photographed with the aftermath of the execution). Perhaps there is no hidden motive for Genewein's photographing the ghetto. And yet, this knowledge extends beyond the boundaries of our understanding. We are at a loss delving into the motives of his passion for still images (he took pride in his work and merely wanted to immortalise its results in his slides). On the other hand, when we pause to think about the character of his work the ghastliness of the photographs becomes evident (in this sense the difference between them and execution photographs is negligible – aesthetically, they are beyond comparison, but they do share the wish to document participation in the greatest achievement of Nazi rule).

*Some viewers approach a film expecting to learn lessons about life. They may admire a film because it conveys a profound or relevant message* <sup>24</sup>. This sentence has been taken out of context – from an explanation of why it is important to interpret films, paying attention to their formal elements. In the case of *Photographer* even the most meticulous analysis is not going to give an answer as to the main lesson propounded by the film. We cannot say what lesson is put forward in Jabłoński's documentary. The task of comprehending Genewein's motives is beyond our reach. On the other hand, we realise that some of his longings and endeavours are also ours. Finally, we are in the dark trying to answer the question posed by Mostowicz at the beginning of the film: "Where is the truth?" Discovery of the unquestionable meaning of the message is not possible as Genewein and Mostowicz appeared as protagonists in two different stories: the former in the history of his own career and the latter in the destruction of his nation. This fact explains why Genewein was not preoccupied with the high mortality as a cost (or the need to continue with deportations). It also sheds light on the absence of death in the slides as the photographed Jews participated in the economic masterplan of the chief accountant. When they were recorded at rest, they were just an aesthetic element of the cityscape, a curiosity immortalised by virtue of the fleeting whim of the photographer.

Translated by TOMASZ ŁYSAK

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- <sup>1</sup> On the strategy of Flaherty's filmmaking see Eric Barnouw's *The Documentary. A History of Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford 1993 /second edition/).
- <sup>2</sup> Compare: B. Winston, *Documentary: How the Myth Was Deconstructed*, "Wide Angle" 1999, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 70-86.
- <sup>3</sup> Discovery of the slides was an event in itself, but the photographer was not instantly identified. The first reproductions I know of were printed in *Lodz Ghetto. Inside the Community under Siege*, ed. by A. Adelson and R. Lapidés, with an afterword by G. Hartmann, New York 1989. The slides were brought to the publishers in 1987. The authors claim that the colour photographic material had been produced in Germany by AGFA since 1936 and that a few photographs of the Warsaw ghetto were also discovered. Slides from the Łódź ghetto – placed in glass frames – were purchased from an antiques dealer who received them from *an undisclosed source*. Recently, two books about the Łódź Ghetto were published in Polish: *Fenomen getta łódzkiego: 1940-1944* (ed. by P. Samuś and W. Puś, Łódź 2006) and *Getto łódzkie – Litzmanstadt Ghetto: 1940-1944* (Łódź 2009). The former reproduces Genewein's photographs in colour, but none of the photographs has been attributed. Genewein's self-portrait is printed together with portraits of Jewish photographers from the ghetto. *Getto łódzkie* is graphically sophisticated but all the reproductions (including Genewein's slides) have been rendered in black-and-white. Ghetto photographers Mendel Grossman, Lajb Maliniak and Henryk Ross have their portraits printed at the end of the book, but Genewein's likeness is nowhere to be seen. Instead, there is a reproduction of a November 1941 announcement banning private photography in the ghetto and requiring all cameras to be sold to the administration (p. 287).
- <sup>4</sup> M. Hirsch, *Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory*, "The Yale Journal of Criticism" 2001, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 5-37.
- <sup>5</sup> Hirsch refers to an essay by Christian Metz, *Photography and Fetish*, in: *Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. C. Squiers, Seattle 1990, p. 158, after M. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 22 and 36.
- <sup>6</sup> M. Hirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- <sup>7</sup> David Shneer's groundbreaking scholarship into Soviet Holocaust photographs raises new questions regarding the iconography of horror. Jewish photographers documenting the freshly discovered sites of mass violence such as ravines, ditches, fields or pits created a new genre dubbed "the Nazi atrocity photo essay" (*Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War, and the Holocaust*, New Brunswick 2012, pp. 143-49.) Investigators frequently tower over exhumed bodies of victims in a manner similar to perpetrator photography: *If I hadn't found this photograph in the commission files, I might have thought it was taken by Nazi soldiers, who gained voyeuristic pleasure from posing before their crimes, smiling and sometimes sending the photographs back to their families in Germany.* (147)
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6-7. It has to be noted that Sontag revised her position on the topic, initially expressed in *On Photography*, in her last book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York 2003). She attempted to retain the pain and unease of the audience.
- <sup>9</sup> A short analysis of the meaning of colour in film and photography can be found in: D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art. An Introduction*, New York 1990, p. 200-201.
- <sup>10</sup> D. Alt, 'Front in Farbe': *Color Cinematography for the Nazi Newsreel, 1941-1945*, "Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television" 2011, vol. 31, no. 1, p. 44.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 43-60.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.
- <sup>13</sup> D. Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Łódź Ghetto*, ed. A. Adelson, trans. K. Turowski, Oxford 1996.
- <sup>14</sup> The name "shop" was used to refer to artisanal "factories" in the ghetto.
- <sup>15</sup> Janina Struk points out that such a preoccupation with the economic aspect of the Jewish district was shared by the Jewish photographers who *photographed workers in factories and workshops and their products, to demonstrate their efficiency to the German authorities and to encourage orders from German companies* (J. Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence*, London 2004, p. 86).
- <sup>16</sup> Interpreting intentions in the photographic record of the past has turned out to be a productive practice in other contexts as well. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer encountered several hurdles in the interpretation of a photograph of Hirsch's parents walking down the main street in Chernovitz, unmolested, in 1942 or 1943 (Compare: M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, *What's Wrong with this Picture? Archival Photographs in Contemporary Narratives*, "Journal of Modern Jewish Studies" 2006, vol. 5,

- no. 2, pp. 229-52). These two authors made an additional contribution to the understanding of street photography as a genre in which Jewish subjects were represented before and during the war (M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, *Incongruous Images: 'Before, During and After' the Holocaust*, "History and Theory" 2009, iss. 48, pp. 9-25). They underlined the concrete historical-geographical context at odds with the institutionalised framework of a photographic archive of the Holocaust at the USHMM, where the photographs did not pass muster. However, the circumstances of Romanian rule in the city contributed to the production of images unimaginable in other parts of Europe at the time.
- <sup>17</sup> In Chełmno the Jews were killed by exhaust fumes rerouted to the goods compartment of trucks sealed after the victims had been pushed inside.
- <sup>18</sup> Ulrich Baer undertakes an iconographic analysis of the slides and their use in Jabłoński's documentary, entering into a debate with historians who tend to view the photographs solely as the result of Nazi ideology (U. Baer, *Revision, Animation, Rescue: Color Photographs from the Łódź Ghetto and Dariusz Jablonski's "Fotoamator"*, in: *Spectral Evidence. The Photography of Trauma*, Cambridge, MA 2002). The critic writes about the slides being *in uncannily realistic color*, listing the hues of different objects: the *sunflower-yellow* of the stars stitched to clothing or *mail carriers in the ghetto sport[ing] a powder-blue band* (p. 151), only to remark that this rainbow of colours has a very limited historical significance. Genewein's complaints about the *unattractive reddish-brown hue* have been read as an indication that traditional associations of the use of colour such as *life, realism, and the present* should rather be seen as *the proverbial blood on the Nazi photographer's hands and slides*. (p. 154)
- <sup>19</sup> G. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive*, Zone Books 2002.
- <sup>20</sup> Marek Hendrykowski writes about a film produced during the war (*Film jako źródło historyczne*, Poznań 2000): George Stevens, an American director and the head of the special Motion Pictures Unit from 1943, directed a documentary in colour in liberated Berlin. According to Hendrykowski, this material was never shown publicly, it was recorded in the convention of home movies with a handheld camera and depicts a private dimension of history. However, the film was finally released on VHS in 1994 as *D-Day to Berlin* and is currently available on DVD.
- <sup>21</sup> Cited by Zygmunt Bauman in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ithaca 1989.
- <sup>22</sup> A thorough study of amateur photography can be found in: R. Chalfen, *Snapshots. Versions of Life*, Bowling Green 1987.
- <sup>23</sup> Z. Bauman, op. cit.
- <sup>24</sup> D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, op. cit., p. 62.

# Starring: Photos

On Polish iconographic films made from photos

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Looking at Polish documentary film output of the last five decades, it is worth noting a group of films made at different times but based on the same method. These documentaries arrange themselves into a certain interesting and special thread. The works in question are short iconographic films<sup>1</sup>, whose entire narrative is formed by suitably organised and filmed photographs. From *Album Fleischera* (*Fleischer's Album*, 1962) by Janusz Majewski and *Powszedni dzień gestapowca Schmidta* (*A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt*, 1963) by Jerzy Ziarnik up to more recent works such as Jerzy Redlich's *Żołnierze führera podbijają Polskę* (*Führer's Soldiers Conquer Poland*, 1996) or Kazimierz Karabasz's *Portret w kropli* (*Portrait in a Drop of Water*, 1997), they constitute a living tradition, to which Polish filmmakers have referred in a number of ways to this day. In the films discussed below, especially those dealing with history, photographs are not substitute forms meant to compensate for never-existing or lost film shots, but rather act as a material in its own right, whose unique features, as Kazimierz Karabasz argues<sup>2</sup>, are not to be found in motion pictures.

## Films from photos – when did this begin?<sup>3</sup>

In his book *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Erik Barnouw mentions the Canadian film *City of Gold* (1957) by Colin Low and Wolf Koenig<sup>4</sup> as the one which inaugurated a new documentary genre: works based entirely on filmed photographs<sup>5</sup>. It is a story about Dawson City<sup>6</sup>, a gold miners' settlement from the end of the 19th century, portrayed by a local photographer A. E. Haig. The film won international acclaim. It received an Oscar for best documentary short, and, according to Barnouw, inspired American filmmakers from the National Broadcasting Company, the producer Donald Hyatt and screenwriter Philip Reisman, who soon afterwards used the same method in two films about the Wild West: *The Real West* (1961) and *End of the Trail* (1965). Both documentaries were based on hundreds of photos from the archives of historical associations and private persons. The photo-based film proved a perfect method for making documentaries about end-of-19th-century America, whose image had already been registered on photographs but not yet recorded on film stock. The effectiveness of this method was proved by the 1990 eleven-hour-long American documentary series *The Civil War*<sup>7</sup>. Its author Ken Burns used 3,000 out of 16,000 Civil War photos which he managed to reach. Despite the predominance of archive photos in the film, its genre purity was "contaminated" by adding filmed historians' statements. Describing *City of Gold* as the work which introduced a new genre, Barnouw does not seem to

mean the photo-based film as such, but rather the iconographic film using images, drawings, documents, various objects<sup>8</sup>.

Actually, in world cinema there have not been very many productions of the film from photos in its pure form. One exception would be France, where the film essayist Chris Marker showed that the new method can be successfully employed in short fiction film<sup>9</sup>. In the words of Andrzej Pitrus, "*La Jetée*" (*The Jetty*, 1962) is a unique project. On the one hand, this film is undoubtedly Marker's first masterpiece, already clearly defining the author's scope of interests, to be developed in many later works; on the other hand, it is, to this day, this artist's only fiction film. One should remember, however, that the director never referred to "*The Jetty*" as a film. He rather described it as a "photo roman", i.e. "photo novel". Indeed, his work has much in common with both literature and photography. What brings it close to the former area is the commentary which replaces dialogue, and the latter is evoked directly, as the film consists of hundreds of static black-and-white frames, and the whole production features only one scene filmed in the classical way, with a camera recording motion picture<sup>10</sup>.

Shortly after, and also using exclusively photographs, Marker made the medium-length documentary *Si j'avais quatre dromadaires* (*If I Had Four Dromaderies*, 1966)<sup>11</sup>. Both films came out as outstanding works of art, and this surely contributed to the promotion of the method, which was later employed with success by other French filmmakers<sup>12</sup>, to mention only the TV series *Contacts* (1993) or *Exodes* (2000). In the former, the camera wanders among contact prints from the negatives of famous photographers, who speak about their techniques, share memories, explain why they selected a particular frame from a series of similar ones, presented on the film strip. The latter series, divided into episodes only three minutes long, shows those areas of the present world where the tragedy of people forced to leave their homes plays out. The series was entirely based on photos by the acclaimed photoreporter Sebastião Salgado.

The birth of the film made from photos came about at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s<sup>13</sup>, when documentary cinema was undergoing a revolutionary transformation, signified by the American direct cinema and French *cinéma vérité*. In the West, it was the television, which favours longer film forms, that gradually became the main producer and distributor of documentaries. There was little room for the development of documentary shorts based exclusively on still photographic material. This was not the case in Poland, where the cinema documentary short flourished. At the same time as in the US and France, two remarkable photo-based films were made here, inaugurating the history of this genre in Polish cinema.

### German albums in the spotlight

One day in 1962, taking a taxi to the Documentary Film Studio in Warsaw, a young film director Janusz Majewski learnt about the existence of a collection of amateur photos from the Second World War, which had been taken by a German officer from Görlitz. The photos drew Majewski's attention. Before long, he borrowed the collection of two thousand photos from the taxi driver, Sylwester Karczewski, and made it the basis of one of the most interesting Polish films of the 1960s: *Fleischer's Album*<sup>14</sup>. At about the same time, Jerzy Ziarnik, another film-

maker working at the Documentary Film Studio, came across an album which had also belonged to a German, a Gestapo officer from Kutno. It was found in the archive of the Central Committee for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland. This collection<sup>15</sup> served as the basis for the film entitled *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt*, finished after the release of Majewski's documentary.

The analogy between the two films was actually limited to the simple fact that they were both based on similar material: amateur photographs taken by the German invaders. Within one formula – the iconographic film – the two filmmakers employed different approaches, thus proving that this genre, despite its seeming limitations, in fact offers considerable possibilities. Having analysed the photos, Majewski together with Krzysztof Kąkolewski wrote a running commentary to the film, in which they reconstructed Fleisher's wartime history, trying to guess his views and thoughts. The film was enhanced by characteristic tunes from the repertoire of German brass bands, which additionally strengthened the ironic overtone of the commentary on *the odyssey of the honest man Fleischer of Görlitz*.

Jerzy Ziarnik limited authorial commentary to the minimum, including it only at the beginning and at the end of his film. He also decided against using any music or sound effects, trying to create on screen as suggestively as possible the impression of looking at the photo album. His work could be even called a film adaptation of the album<sup>16</sup>. The only piece of commentary that we hear quotes Schmidt's own captions under the photos. In comparison to Majewski, Ziarnik makes moderate use of the technique of *repollero*<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, unlike *Fleischer's Album*, in which the filming camera as if penetrates the space of the photographs, in *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt* alongside photos filmed in their full size we watch also cropped details, and even whole album pages with captions, maps, schematic drawings.

Apart from representing different approaches to their photographic material, the two films also have distinctly different protagonists. In Fleischer's pictures it is difficult to find evidence that he can be counted among those who disgraced themselves in the war by committing any particularly shameful deeds. *We did not accuse Fleisher of taking part in the war under the colours of the murderous perpetrators*, Janusz Majewski recalls, *we saw in him an ordinary helpless man, entangled in the war and the crimes, and we tried to conjecture his thoughts on what he found himself participating in*<sup>18</sup>. Schmidt is a radically different "character type". He is a conscientious official of the security service of the Third Reich, who has no scruples about taking part in the expulsions of Jews or arrestations of persons suspected of conspiratorial activity; he assists at executions. Especially telling in this context are the "souvenir" photos which he took of the bodies of people hung in a public execution, of an autopsy on one of the victims of the Nazi terror, or of the distressed face of a Jewish woman shouting something to an SS-officer standing in front of her. The author used to sign his photos with laconic captions such as: *Action against 6,000 Jews in Płońsk*, *Public execution in Kutno on 9th June, 1941*, *A Jewish rubbish heap*.

Both films contributed to the historical documentary with a new perspective on the events described: they showed the war from the point of view of the Germans. Moreover, rather than doing so on the basis of the well-known archival film material from Nazi newsreels, which had been used many times before<sup>19</sup>, the filmmakers made use of private photographs taken by the participants of the war. The two kinds of sources differ in form – film record versus photographic material – and perspec-

tive. To put it in very general terms, the film chronicles represent the official point of view of the Ministry of Propaganda of the Third Reich, which first trained camera operators, then gave them specific instructions concerning the way of filming, and finally approved their recorded material for public distribution. Fleischer and Schmidt, on the other hand, did not work on commission. They took photos for themselves, capturing what they wanted to capture. Thus, their photos enable us to see the private outlook on the war of those who became cogwheels in Hitler's war machine. Such perspective is not accessible through film shots of the chronicles of that time.

This does not mean, however, that *Fleischer's Album* and *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt* only present what was captured in the respective photographs. Both directors performed their own interpretation of the photographs, albeit in different ways. With the commentary present throughout his film, Majewski's interpretation is more explicit than Ziarnik's. Consistently and with characteristic irony, Majewski and Kąkolewski present Fleischer as a "tourist" on an expedition organised by the peculiar tourist agency "Wehrmacht" and leading across the war fronts of France and Russia (*Could the decent father and husband, an average bread-eater of Görlitz, afford distant travels before the war? "La douce France" – perhaps he dreamt of it in his quiet home? Here is his big chance! Mr. Fleischer explores France, following guide books designed somewhere up there in the staff office*).

Ziarnik restricted his interference in the Gestapo officer's album. The filmmaker's interpretation is contained in the selection of photographs, in sparse camera movements, white arrows superimposed onto the pictures and pointing to Schmidt in group photos, or in the occasionally cropped frames, as in the photo of a group of Jews, where Ziarnik as if transcends the tormentor's gaze, and selects individual faces from the crowd, enlarging them. The choice of photographs and captions reveals a comparison of Schmidt to a man hunter. Twice, at the opening and close of the film, we see the same photo of the protagonist, shirtless, with bare chest, in an SS-cap, holding his gun down in a gesture of a wearied huntsman. The runaway, shot down and shot with a Leica, looks like a hit animal. A map of expeditions to arrest successive victims looks like a sketched route of a gruesome safari. After the execution of one of the convicts, Schmidt photographed the autopsy of his body, as though he was capturing the dismembering of prey. Finally, the schematic plan of "Wybrzeże" conspiratorial group, with ID-photos of victims glued in different parts of the diagram, resembles an unusual hunter's trophy wall.

However, the photographs do not tell the whole truth, they do not fully explain Schmidt's role in the portrayed events. Jerzy Ziarnik points this out in his brief commentary at the beginning of the film: *We know that his name was Schmidt. He worked in the Gestapo. We don't know if he tormented the arrested people in person, or only gave commands. In January 1945, in his hurriedly abandoned flat, this album was found, featuring photos which he mostly made himself and signed with his own comments.*

Majewski's and Kąkolewski's commentary persists in seeking to unravel the mystery of "the honest papa from Görlitz": what was his actual attitude to the war and its victims? Especially poignant is the photo reportage from the occupied Warsaw, where in July 1940 Fleischer photographed the faces of Jewish passers-by. The narrator comments: *People with arm bands. Why does he photograph them so eagerly? Is he surprised that they're still allowed to walk the streets? Does this*

*view annoy him? Or perhaps he already knows what they don't know, perhaps he is aware that in a year's time these people will be separated, locked within walls, isolated like wild beasts? So already now he photographs them with the curiosity of a wildlife expert? Their eyes – did he see in them a premonition of that future? Fleischer photographs zealously. What drives him? Satisfaction or compassion? Perhaps his own portrait could explain this?*

The above questions were unexpectedly answered many years after the war, when, after the broadcasting of *Fleischer's Album* on West German television, the protagonist turned up, living in Karlsruhe, and the authors of the documentary soon visited him<sup>20</sup>. Schmidt's fate remained unknown.

And what was the fate of the new documentary method? *Fleischer's Album* and *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt* promoted the new method as though in conjunction with the subject matter. Films about the Second World War employing photographs from various sources became a Polish specialty<sup>21</sup>. First of all, one must mention documentaries based on German photographs and closest to the ones discussed above<sup>22</sup>. Grzegorz Dubowski's *Album zbrodni* (*Crime Album*, 1966) and films by Kazimierz Karabasz: *Zgodnie z rozkazem* (*Following Orders*, 1970) and *Przypis* (*Footnote*, 1970), described German crimes in Polish territory with a matter-of-fact, historical commentary. In 1980, Andrzej Barański made in the Educational Films Studio in Łódź his film *Historia żołnierza* (*Soldier's Tale*), employing the technique of film animation in order to make the "album story" about the fate of Wehrmacht soldiers alive in a new way. The theme and method proved attractive for filmmakers also in more recent times. In 1996, Jerzy Redlich made a twelve-minute TV film *The Führer's Soldiers Conquer Poland*, which was based on Hugo Jaeger's and Heinrich Hoffman's photographs of the 1939 campaign, published as stereoview postcards<sup>23</sup> by the Munich publishing house Raumbild-Verlag Otto Schönstein K. G. In this case, the photos were not private. Jaeger and Heinrich were propaganda photographers, a fact repeatedly underscored in the film commentary. In 2003, the Jewish Historical Institute released a DVD with the iconographic film *Powstanie w gettcie* (*Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*), which featured photographs from Jürgen Stroop's report, processed using modern computer effects. The photos had been probably taken by Jesuiter, a Gestapo officer from the headquarters in Szucha Avenue in Warsaw<sup>24</sup>. Also Stanisław Różewicz based his short film *Wycieczka do Paryża* (*A Trip to Paris*, 2004) largely on propaganda photographs of Hitler and his triumphs from the beginning of the war. Before that, in his iconographic film *Postkarten* (1979) Różewicz presented photos from an album of a German soldier, though this time from World War One. Here, the official image of the war, reproduced on coloured postcards, was juxtaposed with a view far from propagandistic embellishments, which were missing in frontline photos from a soldier's personal album<sup>25</sup>.

One must not omit to mention Dariusz Jabłoński's *Fotoamator* (*Photographer*) – a film which is not wholly iconographic (alongside film shots of the 1990s Łódź, an important part of it is an interview with Albert Mostowicz, a ghetto doctor), yet makes extensive use of photographs<sup>26</sup>. Their author, the Nazi official of the Litzmannstadt ghetto Walter Genewein, was an enthusiast of photography, like Fleischer or Schmidt. Similarly as Ziarnik in *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt*, Jabłoński also comments Genewein's colour slides, which show Jews of Łódź, with

the photographer's own words, quoting letters sent by the Austrian bureaucrat to the manufacturer of his photographic films, the German factory AGFA <sup>27</sup>.

### An unfinished album

War crimes, images of the Holocaust were captured by the perpetrators. The victims rarely had a chance to record their fate on photographs. One of the facets of "ordinary fascism" is precisely this mass rush of thousands of Wehrmacht and SS soldiers, policemen, Nazi officials to register with photo cameras their war "travel", to paste into their private albums photographs from executions in which they took part <sup>28</sup>. The absence of the victims' "photographic gaze" at their own torment is remarkably brought to light in Jerzy Ziarnik's film *Patrząc na twoją fotografię (I Am looking at Your Photograph, 1979)* <sup>29</sup>. The film presents typical photos which can be found in any family album. Except that these come from before 1939. There is no commentary, only popular songs from the 1930s, and captions marking the director's thematic categorization of the photos, e.g.: *My girlfriend, Our wedding, Our holidays*. It is only towards the end of the film that we learn that these are photographs of Polish Jews, and were taken away from them on the Auschwitz ramp together with other belongings. The last shot of the film shows somebody's hand putting the photos away on a shelf in the camp archive. The story of the portrayed people had a tragic ending behind the camp fence. Without photographs. The family album is a form of remembering the shared history of people bonded by blood. It functions in closed, private circulation. It does not need captions, because those who look at it will recognize familiar faces and memorable events. But the albums from the camp archive are anonymous. The circulation in which they had functioned disappeared. The portrayed people were killed, and so were those who could recognise them in the photos. Compiled from fragments of many such Jewish albums into one extraordinary audiovisual album, *I Am Looking at Your Photograph* is a special form of remembrance. The film introduced the surviving photos of those who did not survive into a new space of memory. The irretrievably destroyed family memory was replaced with public memory.

Worth mentioning here is another film from photos, produced with a similar goal in mind, namely to preserve from oblivion images of the world of Polish Jews. In her documentary *Nad Wisłą (On the Vistula River, 1962)*, which was made at the same time as *Fleischer's Album*, Maria Kwiatkowska presented Jewish citizens of the town of Kazimierz nad Wisłą, who had been portrayed by Benedykt Dorys in his photographic series entitled *Kazimierz – 1932* <sup>30</sup>. The commentary was written by Maria Kuncewiczowa (in the film, it is read by Hanna Skarżanka). The main, photographic part of the film was framed with Jerzy Gościk's film shots of contemporary Kazimierz, which feature at the opening and close.

### The war in Polish photo cameras

In many cases, the making of films from photos is triggered by the existence of a remarkable photo collection. As far as historical film is concerned, the use of photographs may be dictated by their unique perspective on past events, as was the

case with many films discussed above. What often proves more important, however, is the very fact that a noteworthy historical event was registered on a large number of photos, especially if it was not registered on film stock or the film account is sparse<sup>31</sup>. In the case of Polish resistance movement during World World Two, collecting any visual material, whether film (especially difficult to obtain<sup>32</sup>) or photographic, for obvious reasons<sup>33</sup> defied the principles of conspiracy and threatened its members, and was only justified if performed for the sake of a particular operational activity. This is why any photos which were taken nonetheless and survived are so valuable. In 1971 Zygmunt Adamski made a documentary ballad about life in a partisan division, thus broadening the thematic scope of iconographic film from photos, and enriching this category with a new variant, in which verbal commentary was replaced with music. Stanisław Ozimek describes the film as follows: *The static "base material" was provided by chronicle photos, revealed after a quarter of a century, depicting the life and fight of one of the Home Army's partisan units, active in Nowogródek region, if I am not mistaken. Treating amateur photos with skill and sensitivity, the filmmaker uses zooms in, close-ups of faces and props, pans, "discovered" midgrounds, to construct scenes and create epic, ballad-like narration. The partisans' lot, at the bonfire, sleeping in hovels, on the lookout, duty at the broadcasting station, wake-up call, lice picking, washing in the stream, report. Alarm signal and march, often for life. Children at the roadside, astonished at seeing Polish troops, a mug of water handed by a country girl. Before the fight, the last roll-up cigarette, a jump, a grenade throw. Captives, captured weapons, a motorcycle being started, brief joy at a local success. The oath ceremony, a partisan wedding, a funeral procession, a priest, a cross, the last volley. Changes of mood, asceticism of means. Refraining from verbal commentary. The main linking element of dramatic composition is Zygmunt Konieczny's music. The simple ballad-like musical concept subtly guides the emotions of the viewer. It seems as though Zygmunt Konieczny's score had been first, and Zygmunt Adamski followed it, composing from photographic frames, brought to life through shot changes, zooms in and close-ups, his partisan ballad about the lot of the human family in the time of war*<sup>34</sup>.

Especially rich, given the difficult wartime conditions, is the collection of journalistic photographs from the Warsaw Uprising 1944. These photos were used in a number of compilation films. They also formed the basis of iconographic films and iconographic sequences in documentaries drawing more extensively on film material. A work which stands out in this group is Tadeusz Makarczyński's *Sceny z Powstania Warszawskiego (Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising, 1983)*. Divided into two parts: *August* and *September*, it uses photos by the War Press Reporter, Sylwester "Kris" Braun. The film is enriched with music, as well as a commentary informing about the people and events captured in the photos, about their time and significance. This film diptych was complemented by the iconographic *Exodus* (1984), which tells about the fate of Warsaw citizens after the fall of the Uprising in October 1944. Makarczyński used photos to construct whole passages of his films already before (for example in *Maraton [The Marathon, 1972]*). Nor were *Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising* and *Exodus* the last films in which he employed the method of film from photos (he returned to it e.g. in *Spacer po Warszawie pana Bolesława Prusa [Mr Bolesław Prus Strolls about Warsaw, 1984]*).



*Fleischer's Album*, dir. Janusz Majewski (1962)

I would like to quote here Tadeusz Makarczyński's statement concerning the use of photographs in film. In a sense, the documentary filmmaker echoes the views of his interlocutor Kazimierz Karabasz, whose much earlier statements and films show that photography does not appear in film instead of moving film pictures, but rather due to its own unique characteristics: *Photography*, Makarczyński says, *conveys the truth about time in a yet more distinct way. Something that might not be too interesting in filmed archival material, when dissected through a certain "photographic analysis", dissected into atoms, into parts, will produce a much stronger effect than in a "living" film shot. In a regular shot we simply cannot achieve this third dimension... We do not allow time for thought, for getting a deeper insight, we do not bring out the detail. Besides, a photograph can be subjected to the process of "bringing out" the dramaturgy that it contains, whereas in archival material (of the regular type), dramaturgy is already given. A film shot cannot undergo any kinds of evolution, while a photo can... And hence a whole array of very original and interesting results could actually be achieved in this area. From ascetic treatment of the crudest kind, through very sophisticated methods...*<sup>35</sup>

In *Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising*, Makarczyński brings out the dramaturgy of the presented photos in several different ways: through their arrangement, camera movements, close-ups. The commentary (written by Waclaw Gluth-Nowowiejski, who took part in the Uprising), adds information to image. It transforms anonymous figures into uprising soldiers with pseudonyms (colonel Jordan with a Nazi flag torn down from the police headquarters), identifies the time and place of the events, speaks about that which is not visible, off-frame or indiscernible for the photo camera. It comments the photojournalist's work. Music underscores the atmosphere of the events, enhancing particular images, details. We hear "songs of the barricades", the recurring motif of Chopin's *Revolutionary Étude*, tunes composed by Krystyna Kraheńska, Jan Ekier, Witold Lutosławski, Andrzej Markowski, Jan Markowski, Andrzej Panufnik. Here is an excerpt from the commentary: *The 23<sup>rd</sup> of August, early dawn. A battle for the Holy Cross Church and the police headquarters flared*



*Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising*, dir. Tadeusz Makarczyński (1983)

up. The fight has been going on for an hour when “Kris” manages to break through to the Staszic Palace. Only a moment ago, these were German positions. From their posts, he takes a series of photos of Krakowskie Przedmieście avenue. Fires have encompassed the whole street<sup>36</sup>. At this point, we watch Krakowskie Przedmieście filled with rubble and smoke; the street is photographed from behind the statue of Nicolaus Copernicus. Foreboding music is playing in the background. The commentary: *Tank and cannon fire, blazing machine gun fire shells the positions of the attacking resistance fighters. Toppled down, the church towers burn in the street. Copernicus is calmly watching the battle from his plinth. On the other side, Christ is carrying his cross in the thickening smoke. The uprising soldiers take the church. “Kris” dashes from the palace, jumps across the street and gets into the church from the back. The inside is on fire.* In the background, we can hear the lyrics of an uprising song. We are looking at a photo of the church entrance, damaged by shells; it was photographed from within the edifice. We can see shattered windows. Next, there begins a series of photos showing, stage by stage, a historical confessional burning. The figures of angels are in flames. Organs sounding. The commentary: *Aflame are wooden window shutters, paintings, and sculptures. The figures of angels seem to be running from the blaze, but in a moment they will be consumed by fire. It is here that Chopin’s heart remained forever.*

In Makarczyński’s film a certain feature of the film from photos is especially clearly manifested: photographs cease to be fragments of events, and become part of a narrative, elements of a story which is constructed from whole photos and their cropped sections. The film constitutes a context for the photos, enriching them with meaning which they do not have on their own<sup>37</sup>. *Editing the photos in a new way, the moving camera which films them re-activates the energy hidden in static frames. Makarczyński arranges from “Kris’s” photos complete film sequences with their own dramaturgy: the uprising wedding, the fight in the Holy Cross Church, the funeral in a backyard, the “Prudential” skyscraper being hit by a mortar shell, the*

*bombing of Hoża street, the concert in the garden of former “U aktorek” [The Actresses’] café, citizens leaving their homes after the capitulation... These whole sequences add up, arrange themselves into narrative structures, begin to throb with life. An illusion of movement is produced. At some points, “Kris” was indeed taking picture after picture, capturing the ambience of a whole scene. Makarczyński followed this. He directs our attention in such a way that it seems as though a gesture frozen in a photo has been completed in front of our eyes, that a grimace of pain has shown on a face. He “ordered” boys to laugh, a liaison officer to run across the street, and clods of earth suspended in the air – to cover the coffin; it seems to us that the strange lonely passer-by shows up in the ruined Marszałkowska street only as we look, although in fact he has been in the photo all along. “Scenes of the Uprising” makes us aware yet again of the photographic phenomenon of “arrested time”. We are not watching the past. Nor is it the present, but rather something like a “past continuous”, a past which keeps re-enacting itself, playing out its “scenes” anew before our eyes<sup>38</sup>.*

Not only Makarczyński was inspired by the significance of the Warsaw Uprising in Poland’s recent history and by the fact that the event was registered on at least several thousand photos<sup>39</sup>. In 1968, Jan Łominicki made *Gienek*, a documentary portrait of Eugeniusz Lokajski, one of the photojournalists of the Uprising. The film is not wholly based on iconographic material. Its important part are memories recounted by Lokajski’s sister, who rescued the photos of her brother after he was killed in the Uprising. Sequences composed of photographs, however, constitute a highly significant element of the film. As Alicja Iskierko put it, *Such is the emotional and evidential power of the uprising photos that they break the frames of the story about Eugeniusz Lokajski, they do not want to subject themselves to the general concept of the film, they constitute an independent value, in a sense they make a film within a film. And they have the strongest effect on the viewer’s memory and imagination. They are what makes the dramaturgy of this beautiful film story seem to falter, yet at the same time being the greatest asset of this piece<sup>40</sup>.*

A year after the production of *Gienek*, Wiesław Stradomski’s book *Realizacja filmu w praktyce (Filmmaking in practice)* was published. Addressed to amateur filmmakers, it drew their attention to the technical ease of making a film from photos at home<sup>41</sup>. The author also indicated the possibility of creating a film about the Warsaw Uprising<sup>42</sup> on the basis of numerous photographs published in albums which he listed in his guidebook. He developed this idea, and included also his own screenplay and shooting script of a film from photos entitled *Godzina W (The “W” Hour)*. It is worth noting that in the same year that *Gienek* was produced, young Krzysztof Kieślowski made for the TV his *Zdjęcie (The Photo)*<sup>43</sup>, in which, accompanied by a team of journalists, he sets off to search for two small boys portrayed in a photograph from the Warsaw Uprising<sup>44</sup>. Krzysztof Lang, in turn, filmed the photographs of Sylwester Braun in *Cienie (Shadows, 1983)*, his film about an exhibition for the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising<sup>45</sup>. In 1979 Władysław Ślesicki shot a one-minute sequence from the Uprising photos as a background for the opening credits in his fiction film *...droga daleka przed nami...* [...a long way ahead of us...]. The photographs are used in films about the Uprising till this day, though usually functioning as illustration complementary to the witnesses’ accounts or authorial commentary.

### Into a more distant future

The 1980s also brought several iconographic films which employed photographs from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Apart from the already mentioned, earlier *Postkarten* by Stanisław Różewicz, one example of a film belonging to this category and time period is Roman Wionczek's *Polacy na starych fotografiach* (*Poles in Old Photographs*, 1982). Two films stand out from the rest: Michał Maryniarczyk's *Warszawianki podróż do Italii* (*A Warsaw Lady's Travel to Italy*, 1984) and Tadeusz Makarczyński's *Mr Bolesław Prus Strolls about Warsaw*. Maryniarczyk used in his film excerpts from Władysław Reymont's *Z pamiętnika* (*From a Diary*, 1903) to construct a monologue of a young townswoman, which we hear while watching postcards and photos of travels abroad. Makarczyński, in turn, reached for Bolesław Prus's *Kroniki* (*Chronicles*, 1874-1911), which served as a source of information for the vivid commentary written by Jerzy Kasprzycki. At the same moment in time, Andrzej Kazanecki arranged and filmed Artur Grottger's paintings to create a historical photoreportage in *Artura Grottgera opowieść o powstaniu styczniowym* (*Artur Grottger's Tale of the January Uprising 1863-1864*, 1984). Here we approach the border between the film from photos and films based on other iconographic material. Apart from photographs, Makarczyński and Maryniarczyk incorporated into their films also drawings and illustrations, presenting them in the same way. Due to their seamless narration, when watching these films we hardly notice that after showing a photo the camera moves on to present a realistic illustration, probably taken from a magazine from those times<sup>46</sup>.

### Karabas and photographs

Some of the themes described above appear in Kazimierz Karabasz's films<sup>47</sup>. Apart from films from photos, his output features also other works in which photos play a crucial part. In 1970 Karabasz made two iconographic films from photographs documenting German war crimes. *Following Orders* tells about those committed in Poland by the Wehrmacht. It includes photos from the defence war in September 1939, from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising 1943 (from Stroop's report)<sup>48</sup> and the Warsaw Uprising 1944. They are accompanied by a commentary written by Karol Małcużyński. The film was made at a time when the relations between the Polish People's Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany were tense, also due to the issue regarding Germany's acknowledgment of the inviolability Polish western frontiers<sup>49</sup>. The other film, *Footnote*, discusses the origins and events of "Bloody Sunday", which took place in September 1939 in Bydgoszcz, the film director's hometown.

These historical films function at the periphery of Karabasz's work, whose core is the everyday life of average people living here and now. For the author of *Rok Francka W.* (*A Year in the Life of Franek W.*, 1967), also in this case photographs serve as one of the key modes of description. In some films, they build whole scenes, on others, they provide material for separate iconographic film works, such as *Lato w Żabnie* (*Summer in Żabno*, 1977) or *Portrait in a Drop of Water*. Photographs feature also in those of his documentaries which are self reflexive in character. In the 1965 *Na progu* (*On the threshold*), Karabasz presented various methods

which a documentary filmmaker can use when approaching a given subject. In this case, the task in question was to portray young Polish women at the threshold of adult life. As one of the possible methods accessible to a documentary filmmaker, Karabasz suggested a film from photos. The attempt at achieving a more intimate portrayal was based on excerpts from letters sent by teenage girls to “Filipinka” bi-weekly magazine. Karabasz juxtaposed them with photos of young women. Faces picked from the crowd, captured in a moment of pensiveness, gazing into distance, correspond to the confessions which we hear off-camera. The camera slowly zooms into the photos, strengthening the effect of gaining insight into the inner world of the protagonists, who speak about their disappointment, letdowns, anxiety of the future.

In 1974 Karabasz made another self reflexive documentary: *Punkt widzenia* (*Point of View*). The film presents teenage amateur photographers from the Community Centre in Włodawa. It is not an iconographic film. Apart from photographs made by the protagonists of the film, there are film shots taken by the cinematographer Antoni Staśkiewicz at the market square in Włodawa, and during a heated discussion which the young club members were having, leaning over their photos. Nevertheless, the most essential part of the film are indeed the photos and their authors’ accompanying comments on the soundtrack. Observations and thoughts shared on record by these very young photographers are certainly not far from what some documentary filmmakers could say about their own work <sup>50</sup>.

Karabasz’s 1979 book *Cierpliwe oko* (*The patient eye*) contains his reflections on the work of a documentary film director. Alongside chapters entitled *Protagonist in a Documentary*, *Observation*, *Human Face*, *Editing*, *Word*, *Narration in a Documentary* and *Truth*, there is also a section called *Photographs*. As the author of *Muzykanci* (*The Musicians*, 1960) sees it, photographs offer filmmakers a chance to enrich their works with a dimension of the reality which cannot be captured by a film camera. *The longer I watch the employment of photographs (photographic prints, not freeze-frames) in the documentary film, Karabasz wrote, the more this practice appeals to me. I am fascinated by two things: the opportunity to contemplate that moment in which a given person and his or her environment were only for a split second, and the opportunity to discern the “material substance” of what is shown in a photo (landscape relief, people’s clothes, shapes of furniture). Both these qualities are absent from a “living” film. And they are, I believe, not irrelevant to any filmmaker who wants to do more than just describe interesting events* <sup>51</sup>.

Karabasz broadened the scope of Polish iconographic film from photos by introducing contemporary subject matter <sup>52</sup>. In 1977 he made *Summer in Żabno*, a film composed from photographs taken by a student of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Maria Kolano. Upon the film director’s suggestion, she took a photo camera along when she went to her home in the country for holidays, promising to systematically register daily events. She only saw her photos developed after returning to Warsaw. The director used a tape recorder to register the first impressions, remarks and observations which Kolano made on looking at her photos. The recorded material provided a basis for the monologue put on the soundtrack of *Summer in Żabno*. What resulted was an interesting film-photo diary. Its private perspective and the personal tone of the commentary make the film unique in the documentary output of that time.

In his earlier and later films Karabasz employed photos from various sources: from film stills in a cinema display case (*Ludzie z pustego obszaru* [*People from an Empty Zone*, 1957]), through photos which he had taken himself (*Przenikanie* [*Assimilating*, 1978]; *O świcie przed zmierzchem* [*At Dawn and before Dusk*, 1999]) and photos from family albums of his protagonists (*Czas podwójny* [*Double Time*, 2001]), to archive photographs (*Próba materii* [*Material Test*, 1981]). He returned to the film from photos in the 1990s. Before making the iconographic *Portrait in a Drop of Water*, entirely composed from his own photographs, he created two other films, largely based on photos: *Na przykład – ulica Grzybowska 9* (*9 Grzybowska Street, for Example*, 1991) and *Okruchy z ulicy Żelaznej i okolicy (październik '93)* (*Crumbs from Żelazna Street and Neighbourhood /October '93/*, 1994). *Portrait in a Drop of Water* is a group portrayal of Poles from the last decade of the 20th century<sup>53</sup>. Black-and-white photos of a city on a summer day show people in a crowd, individual figures, viewed from afar, from the back. Now and then a face is visible. Recurring as a motif is the only moving picture in the film: a city roundabout, with strings of cars passing incessantly. The figures from the crowd materialise as individual off-camera voices. We hear people of different ages speaking, answering questions about their hopes, fears, thought with which they start and end the day. In the night scene which concludes the film, photos of a block of flats are accompanied by words from Tadeusz Różewicz's poem about another day which has passed...

### Photographs in the eye of cine-camera

*Fleischer's Album*, *I Am Looking at Your Photograph*, *Scenes of the Warsaw Uprising*, *Summer in Żabno* and other similar short films constitute a separate trend in Polish documentary school<sup>54</sup>. Central to this group are works about Poland's most recent history, as registered on photographic film by people from opposite sides of the barricades. Alongside these films are also those which show less dramatic events, albeit more distant in time. Finally, there are some fully contemporary pictures<sup>55</sup>. These films usually bring out and emphasise the private look, which constitutes an important and valuable aspect of the filmed photos, rarely present in documentary film records from a few decades ago, and often superficial and sloppy in those from a couple or a dozen years back. Such works also enable to show on screen that special dimension of the reality which escapes a film camera, yet is accessible to the camera of a photographer, who is able to capture on film a flash of time, and show in it the texture of the reality, composed of human gestures, glances, objects, architectures, shadows and light spots. Distinct from other iconographic films, akin to the photographic diaporama<sup>56</sup>, in the hands of Polish documentary filmmakers the film from photos proved to be a very comprehensive formula, inspiring creative explorations<sup>57</sup>. The array of formal solutions and themes, broadened from one film to the next for several decades, gives us reasons to believe that the tradition of Polish documentary iconographic film from photos is going to be continued.

MIKOŁAJ JAZDON

Translated by ZOFIA ZIEMANN

- <sup>1</sup> Marek Hendrykowski defines iconographic film as a *film work whose visual make-up are still pictures: painted, graphic, photographic etc., brought to life by cinematic techniques*. M. Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych*, Poznań 1994, p. 122.
- <sup>2</sup> *What is decisive in photography is the moment, being the essence of the mood, situation, type of person. That moment often escapes a film shot, dissolves in motion. (...) In film, three subsequent shots do not mean much, whereas three pictures can create a certain sum, thought, event. Co można zobaczyć w szarości. Rozmowa Małgorzaty Sadowskiej z Kazimierzem Karabaszem*, in: *Chelmska 21. 50 lat Wytwórci Filmów Dokumentalnych i Fabularnych w Warszawie*, ed. B. Janicka, A. Kołodyński, Warszawa 2000, p. 173.
- <sup>3</sup> An interesting example of the use of photography is a 1898 film by Albert E. Smith and J. Stuart Blackton, founders of the American Vitagraph Company in New York. When on returning from the front of the Spanish-American War they realised that they had not managed to register the most important event, the battle of Santiago de Cuba, they came up with the idea of reconstructing the naval battle in the office room of their studio. To do this, they bought commonly available sets of photographs depicting the ships of both fighting parties. They cut out the images of battleships from their backgrounds and placed them together at a certain distance in a small container filled with water to imitate the sea. All that remained to be done was to place miniature gunpowder charges in the right places, make cigar smoke into battle smoke, and, after running the camera, pull the tiny strings attached to the cut-out ships accordingly. Staged out in this manner, the naval battle was registered on film stock, and then successfully presented as a two-minute hot war front report entitled *The Battle of Santiago Bay*. Cf. Albert E. Smith, *Taking the Camera to War*, in: *Imagining Reality. The Faber Book of the Documentary*, ed. K. Macdonald, M. Cousins, London – Boston 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. E. Barnouw, *Documentary. A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, New York – Oxford 1993, pp. 200-201.
- <sup>5</sup> In fact, many films from photos feature proper film shots, which are often employed as a compositional frame. In *City of Gold*, these are shots of contemporary Dawson City, introduced at the beginning and at the end of the film. At the beginning of *Fleischer's Album*, there is a film shot showing a hand which opens the eponymous album. *A Working day of gestapo man Schmidt* and Jerzy Ziarnik's *Patrząc na twoją fotografię (I Am Looking at Your Photograph)* offer similar examples. The opening of the former features a brief shot of the archive building of the Central Committee for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland, and then a safe from which a photo album is being taken. The latter shows photographs being put back on a shelf after viewing. Kazimierz Karabasz's *Summer in Żabno*, in turn, presents at the beginning several brief shots of the protagonist during her work in the chemical lab at the university. The moment that the girl leans over the microscope, the first photo appears.
- <sup>6</sup> See also D. Duncan, *City of Gold*, in: *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film*, ed. I. Aitken, New York 2006, pp. 230-231.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. E. Barnouw, op. cit., pp. 327-329.
- <sup>8</sup> Such works constitute a sizable group, including not only films on art, which make use of various kinds of art pieces, but also films telling about history through the presented items and documents (Jerzy Ziarnik's *Museum / Muzeum*, 1966/, Tadeusz Jaworski's *The Pultusk Codex / Kodeks Pultuski*, 1957/).
- <sup>9</sup> In Poland, the same principle was applied in Walerian Borowczyk's fiction short *Szkola (The School)*, 1958) and in sections of Andrzej Munk's fiction film *Pasażerka (Passenger)*, 1963).
- <sup>10</sup> A. Pitrus, *Chris Marker. Pamięć obrazu i obrazy pamięci*, in: *Autorzy kina europejskiego II*, ed. A. Helman, A. Pitrus, Kraków 2005, p. 184.
- <sup>11</sup> *Chris Marker's film "Si j'avais quatre dromadaires" (1966), a brilliantly orchestrated meditation on photographs of all sorts and themes, suggests a subtler and more rigorous way of packaging (and enlarging) still photographs. Both the order and the exact time for looking at each photograph are imposed; and there is a gain in visual legibility and emotional impact*. S. Sontag, *On Photography*, New York – London – Toronto 1977, p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> In 1990, the renowned French cinematographer Jean-Louis Bompont made a four-minute film entitled *Correspondance*. Consisting of dozens of photos, it tells about a Parisian saxophone player whose thoughts take him to 1930s America while he is playing at a metro station. We watch photographs of night clubs, New York streets, portraits of famous jazz musicians, dynamically edited to the music playing in the film.

<sup>13</sup> In 1967, Sergei Yutkevich and Naum Kleiman used the surviving tape fragments to reconstruct Sergei Eisenstein's *Bezhin Meadow* (*Bezhin lug*) as an iconographic film.

<sup>14</sup> *Equipped with a magnificent Leica camera, Fleisher was a fanatic adept of photography, and took pictures of whatever he could: trenches at the French front during the "phoney war", a guard change in front of Hotel Europejski in the occupied Warsaw, Jews with armbands in the streets of Lublin, action in the Ukraine, his Christmas leave in Görlitz, i.e. Polish Zgorzelec, the conquered Kharkiv, and finally the retreat from Stalin-grad in snowdrifts and blizzards. There was no doubt that this material could be used to make a great documentary, we only had to bring to life the still pictures, both in visual terms and in the sense of presenting the viewer with a coherent message about this finding. I drew into collaboration Krzysztof Kąkolewski, who at the time was a star of press reportage, and together we came to the conclusion that the most interesting in this material were the alleged motivations and emotions accompanying Fleischer when he was taking his pictures, and that our task was to build a sequence of hypotheses which would seek to answer the following: Why did he photograph this? Why did he focus his lens on this particular scene? What did he think and feel while taking these pictures? I arranged the best photos into chronological sequences, and I made them as alive as I could by introducing camera movement: they were registered with zooms in and out, pans, and travelling shots, so that at times they seem like film pictures. In the commentary, we speculated on Fleisher's state of mind. And this personal, intimate, quiet narration proved better than the immediately self-suggesting classical journalistic style. At that time, twenty years after the war, it strongly appealed to our viewers, whose sensitivity had been somewhat dulled by the militant politicised journalism, practiced on behalf of the society and nation, and perceiving the world in these terms. We did not accuse Fleisher of taking part in the war under the colours of the murderous perpetrators; we saw in him an ordinary helpless man, entangled in the war and the crimes, and we tried to conjecture his thoughts on what he found himself participating in.* J. Majewski, *Retrospektywka*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 231-233.

<sup>15</sup> *In Germany, photography had always been immensely popular. It was practiced by a great number of photo enthusiasts, who took their*

*cameras along also during the war. Their predilection for capturing all moments of wartime life became the source of countless amateur pictures. They were "memory shots" of sorts. They would often make up entire albums. The uniform-clad photo enthusiasts used to photograph virtually everything: combat scenes, troops entering the conquered towns, the soldiers' social life, but also street executions, mass murders, interrogation and torture of prisoners, pacification operations, destruction of cities and villages. Sometimes the perpetrator would pose next to his victim's body. It was thanks to this predilection for having pictures of oneself taken anywhere and in any circumstances that today we have irrefutable evidence of Nazi crimes. The "memory shots" which were to commemorate the triumphal march of fascist "Übermenschen" across Europe, and, sent to families in the "Vaterland", show military achievements in the conquered countries, turned against their authors, completely counter to their intent and will: the photos became accusatory documents, enclosed with the court records of cases against war criminals.* H. Latoś, *Z historii fotografii wojennej*, Warszawa 1985, p. 274.

<sup>16</sup> *The process of adapting various material refers not only to what had existed prior to the film, but also to that which is born concurrently with it, and potentially also to that which may be born in the future. Thus, the film composition technique of adaptation is in the process of constant development and change it is characterised by a certain openness. As a result of adaptation, material of different origin, from different time periods, different levels of culture enters the film, and undergoes a process of synthesis. Rather than being a mosaic, a jigsaw puzzle, a random collection, the film is a whole which gives the impression of being homogenous, even though it is not.* A. Helman, *Adaptacja – podstawowa technika twórcza kina*, "Kino" 1998, no. 1, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup> Marek Hendrykowski defines repollero as a filming technique with the use of still images: photographs, paintings, collages etc., employed mainly in films on art; it makes use of zooms, in and out, as well as pans and dissolves, which enable the author to introduce narration while filming static images. Repollero technique was used e.g. by Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica in their film "Nagrodzone uczucia" (*Love Required*, 1957). M. Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych*, op. cit., p. 251.

<sup>18</sup> J. Majewski, op. cit., p. 233.

- <sup>19</sup> In his 1965 documentary *Ostpost 1942-4*, Bohdan Kosiński used film material from the official Nazi newsreels, combining them with excerpts from German soldiers' letters home. In this way, he juxtaposed the official image of the events with personal accounts.
- <sup>20</sup> *We saw the people whom we had known from photos, but twenty years older: the wife, the son, the daughters, only the grandparents were no longer alive. It was very uncanny, because having been exposed to their portraits for so many months, we subconsciously treated those people as someone close; also they showed trust towards us, they seemed to appreciate our non-aggressive objectivism, and even a hint of compassion, present in our commentary, for people who despite belonging to those who unleashed the war; were also its victims. When questioned, Fleischer usually confirmed our conjectures, he was clearly satisfied with the image of himself which we had created.* J. Majewski, op. cit., p. 234.
- <sup>21</sup> Authors of "film Polski.pl" database describe Stanisław Trzaska's *Album śmierci* (*Death Album*, 1978) in the following way: *The film presents the origins of an unusual photo album made by a German policeman Rozner and entitled "Sühne für Bochnia" (Punishment for Bochnia), which was prepared for the Governor-General (Hans Frank, chief of the "Generalgouvernement", a Nazi administrative unit in the occupied Polish territory, 1939-1945 – translator's note) in Krakow. The album is a gruesomely detailed photographic account of the crime on civilian citizens which was committed in Bochnia in December 1939. Fifty people randomly selected from among the inhabitants were murdered. The film account is a reconstruction of the carnage on the basis of the retrieved album.* <http://www.film-polski.pl/fp/index.php/4215633> (accessed: 10.12.2013).
- <sup>22</sup> Photos of cut-off human heads, an axe on the neck of a convict who lay his head on the headsman's block, human figures standing before the firing squad, convicts on the gallows, a noose being placed around the neck, the murdered bodies on the snow. These and similar pictures made by German photo enthusiasts in uniforms feature in Mikhail Romm's famous 1965 Soviet compilation film *Ordinary Fascism* (*Obyknovennyy fashizm*, alternative English title *Triumph Over Violence*, also known in the UK as *Echo of the Jackboot* and in the US as *Trumps Over Violence*). They feature in chapter fourteen, entitled the same as the whole film. They are accompanied by
- the following commentary: *There were photographs found in their pockets. In the photos we can see themselves, their wives, mothers, children, and this! This is what they carried together with the pictures of their children and mothers. What state must a man be driven to that he should carry something like this as a memento, as a pleasant memory?*
- <sup>23</sup> Stereoview cards produced an effect approximating three-dimensionality, which was possible thanks to special looking glasses sold together with the pictures.
- <sup>24</sup> Jesuiter was indicated by Henryk Latoś as the probable author of photos from Stroop's report – idem, op. cit.
- <sup>25</sup> Marek Hendrykowski describes the film as follows: *Not a single moving image. Following sequences of successive cuts accompanied by repollero technique, we move, postcard after postcard, from Alpine mountain passes to the foreground of Warsaw and to the Przemysł Fortress, we take part in the bombing of the Tower Bridge in London, we shell Paris from the Big Bertha. All that to the beat of boisterous marching tunes, which turn this military passage into one big succession of conquests. But suddenly things start to complicate. Counted in dozens and hundreds of days, the frontline drudgery and toil, homesickness, no hope that the war would end soon, daily pain, illness, stays at field hospitals, and finally – death. A moment of silence marks the beginning of the second part of the film, in which postcards are replaced by wartime photos from a German album (found one day by the filmmaker at a used book seller's). The photographs show horrid, shocking images of the real effects of the war: Dead bodies in the streets, remains of bombed cities, soldiers' corpses in muddy front trenches, forests of crosses stretching up to the horizon. The jaunty marches are no longer to be heard, gloomy one-note music of death appears instead, occasionally punctuated by ominous percussion accents. And finally, the image of a simple soldier looking our way, holding yet more crosses for the fallen. His gaze at us is the last image of "Postkarten".* M. Hendrykowski, Stanisław Różewicz, Poznań 1999, pp. 98-99.
- <sup>26</sup> The film uses fragments of Krzysztof Krauze's unfinished *Fotoamator*, which, had it been produced, would have probably been a "pure" iconographic film.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. T. Łysak, *O niemożliwej wierze w dokument. "Fotoamator" Dariusza Jabłońskiego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2003, no. 43 (English

- translation published in this volume as: idem, *On the Impossibility of Believing in the Documentary*. Dariusz Jabłoński's "Photographer").
- <sup>28</sup> That the Germans have an inclination to photograph their crimes was known already during the war. Polish resistance movement knew how to use this: *In view of the sadism of Nazi perpetrators, manifesting itself for example in their habit of taking photos of themselves with their living, tormented or dead victims, spontaneous action was launched, and subsequently sanctioned with instructions from conspiratorial organisations, of thorough identification of films brought by Germans to photo studios to have them developed. Photo prints of pictures meant for albums of various Fleischers and Schmidts added to the repertory of Polish documentation of the time of the occupation. Using conspiratorial channels, the resistance managed to dispatch some of those photographs abroad. They shocked the public opinion in the West.* S. Ozimek, *Film polski w wojennej potrzebie*, Warszawa 1974, p. 160.
- <sup>29</sup> *The hardest problem concerned the technique. We couldn't shoot this in some overtly fanciful way, although this is often done in similar situations. Those photographs had to be shown in as simple a manner as possible. We reproduced them one-to-one. I was only wondering how to approach such small objects. I decided to film them with zooms in, zooms out, and pans.* Tylko prawda. Z Michałem Bukojemskim, operatorem filmu "Patrzę na twoją fotografię", rozmawiała Iwona Cegielkówna, in: *Chelmska 21...*, op. cit., p. 194.
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. J. Fuksiewicz, *Fotografie przywrócone życiu*, "Film" 1964, no. 16.
- <sup>31</sup> *When from 1968 to 1972 the Polish documentary sought to partially fill the "zones of non-visible reality", to use Marc Ferro's term, a fuller presentation of resistance activity and conspiracy fight was hindered not only by censorship, but more so by the lack of audiovisual material. (...) Sometimes, the shortages of archival film repertory were complemented by sets of photographs, both Polish and German in origin, which remained extant after the war or were found years later. At times, documentary narration was based on frames of photographs "animated" only with changing shots, editing, and music illustration. The specific asceticism of material occasionally produced unexpected cognitive and even aesthetic effects.* S. Ozimek, *Film dokumentalny*, in: *Historia filmu polskiego*, vol. 6 (1968-1972), ed. R. Marszałek, Warszawa 1994, p. 212.
- <sup>32</sup> The Polish underground's enormous difficulties in producing film material are described by Stanisław Ozimek, *Film polski w wojennej potrzebie*, op. cit.
- <sup>33</sup> *Not everywhere and not all underground organisations allowed their members to take photographs. Only activities of the occupation authorities, round-ups, executions, and other forms of persecution could be presented in the photos. Photographed were also all kinds of German public notices displayed in the streets. Photography was employed first and foremost as a technique allowing to reproduce documents. The point was that no members of conspiracy organisations should be visible in photos, that their names, including the name of the photographer, should remain unknown.* H. Latoś, op. cit., p. 166.
- <sup>34</sup> S. Ozimek, op. cit.
- <sup>35</sup> T. Makarczyński, in: K. Karabas, *Bez fikcji. Z notatek filmowego dokumentalisty*, Warszawa 1985, p. 65.
- <sup>36</sup> The commentary is read by Krzysztof Kolbasiuk, known to many viewers as the Warsaw Uprising soldier Łukasz Zbożny, whom he played in Jan Łomnicki's popular TV series *Dom* (*The House*, 1980).
- <sup>37</sup> *Yet, unlike memory, photographs do not in themselves preserve meaning. They offer appearances – with all the credibility and gravity we normally lend to appearances – prised away from their meaning. Meaning is the result of understanding functions. "And functioning takes place in time and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand." Photographs in themselves do not narrate. Photographs preserve instant appearances.* J. Berger, *About Looking*, London 2009, p. 55.
- <sup>38</sup> R. Nowak, *Ucieczka i powrót*, "Kino" 1984, no. 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. *Z kamerą w powstańczej Warszawie*. Text, photo selection, layout design S. Kopf, Warszawa 1994.
- <sup>40</sup> A. Iskierko, "Gienek", czyli siła prawdomównych obrazów, "Ekran" 1968, no. 50.
- <sup>41</sup> *I would like to draw the amateurs' attention to iconographic documentary film also because it is easily achievable in their working environment. It can be made even in a small room, using one strong lamp (nitraphot or fotolite), or even sunlight. One can focus on the work, in peace and without third parties involved, carefully balancing frames and composing shots, one does not need to hide the film camera from camera-shy persons, or to carry its load around. And if something goes wrong the*

- first time, one can easily and at any time repeat and improve the bad shot, without concern that in the meantime something has changed in the film set. Finally, with such films one can do justice to people and events of the past if they deserve the attention of the present and future generations. W. Stradomski, *Realizacja filmu w praktyce, przykłady i ćwiczenia wraz z metodyką szkolenia warsztatowego*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>42</sup> The subject of our sample film will be the now historical facts connected with the outbreak and course of the uprising which began in Warsaw on August 1, 1944, and lasted for two months. Conducive to our plans is the abundance of photographic material, issued in special albums by several Polish publishers. Ibidem, p. 14.
- <sup>43</sup> He owed the idea to Kazimierz Karabasz, who gave him an old photograph taken towards the end of the war; it showed two nicely dressed six-year-old boys holding rifles. Kieślowski filmed the story of finding them after many years. S. Zawisliński, *Kieślowski. Ważne, żeby iść...* Izabelin 2005, p. 112.
- <sup>44</sup> This photo was recently reproduced on the cover of the Italian edition of Norman Davis's *Rising '44. The Battle for Warsaw*.
- <sup>45</sup> The young documentary filmmaker Lang made a film in which the exhibition and "Kris's" photos served as a point of departure for his own (his generation's?) assessment of the Uprising tradition. The film begins in an intriguing way: the cinematographer wanders in the dark, the camera brings out brighter spots of the photos. Presented in this way, they seem to belong to the reality. We get the impression of peering from hiding at fragments of the reality of that time: the Uprising soldiers in helmets won from the Germans, the barricades, the ruins. R. Nowak, op. cit.
- <sup>46</sup> An interesting example of using photos together with other iconographic material is Piotr Andejew's *Fotoplastykon (Kaiserpanorama, 1978)*, which presents Zdzisław Beksiński's photographs and paintings.
- <sup>47</sup> I develop this further in: M. Jazdon, *Fotografie w filmach Kazimierza Karabasza*, in: *Kadrowanie rzeczywistości. Szkice z socjologii wizualnej*, ed. J. Kaczmarek, Poznań 2004.
- <sup>48</sup> Photos from the Warsaw Uprising served as a basis for photographic sequences in *Epizod z 1942 roku (An Episode from 1942, 1983)*, a teleplay based on the journals of Janusz Korczak, which Kazimierz Karabasz directed for the Polish Television Theatre.
- <sup>49</sup> *Following Orders* takes for its point of departure the image which the Bundeswehr had at that time, and which tried to draw from the myth rather than tradition of Wehrmacht's "clean hands". The opening shots of the film show the FRG army training, and are accompanied by the following commentary: *The Bundeswehr – the largest land army in Western Europe. Already as many as half a million young Germans from the FRG are serving in it. They are the inheritors of German military tradition. A tradition followed also by the Wehrmacht during the difficult times of Hitler's rule; it kept its honour and clean hands. This is what young Germans are told, and the world. What is the truth about that military tradition and honour of the Wehrmacht thirty years ago?* At this point the shot stops in a freeze frame, the image of marching soldiers is suspended. *This film tells about small bits of a great war. Basing on the few extant photos – only about that which happened in Poland.*
- <sup>50</sup> I was fascinated by the way in which those young people approached photography. Usually in such circles works are discussed in terms of "I like it" or "I don't like it". And there I met with something totally unexpected. I was astonished that very young people can be so perceptive – and they were not students of art academies, no professors had hammered into them that "art is...", that art mediates between one human being and another. They were not backed up by extensive reading; as for photo albums, they only knew the most popular publications, namely yearbooks full of illustrated prospects. That could not be any inspiration for them. The inspiration came from within, from their sensitivity, and from someone in the Community Centre who animated them. *Co można zobaczyć w szarości. Rozmowa Małgorzaty Sadowskiej z Kazimierzem Karabaszem*, op. cit.
- <sup>51</sup> K. Karabasz, *Cierpliwe oko*, Warszawa 1979, p. 116.
- <sup>52</sup> In his 1970 film *Pociąg (The Train)* Andrzej Brzozowski used photos taken of passengers in train cars and corridors. The film about a train pushing with difficulty through snow drifts was interpreted as a metaphor of the reality of that time.
- <sup>53</sup> "Portrait in a Drop of Water" is Karabasz's first post-1989 attempt to present a group portrait of Poles. Eight years have passed since the breakthrough of 1989. No more queuing, but no jobs either; the society began to exhibit views and attitudes unknown before, unex-

pected. Centred around questions about people's satisfaction with their work, their anxieties, things that move them, their need for change, this portrait is in fact something more than the eponymous metaphorical drop. These simple questions and answers contain the essence of everyday human existence. Although we are usually unaware of them, it is by the answers to these questions that our choices are governed, our conduct in matters important and special. M. Hendrykowska, *Patrząc intensywnie*, in: *Klucze do rzeczywistości. Szkice i rozmowy o polskim filmie dokumentalnym po roku 1989*, ed. M. Hendrykowska, Poznań 2005, p. 119.

<sup>54</sup> Documentary films from photos are among the most often awarded Polish films: *Fleischer's Album* (Silver Wawel Dragon at the 2nd All-Polish Short Film Festival in Krakow – 1963, Golden Gate Award for best war reportage at San Francisco International Film Festival – 1963, honorary mention at the IFF in Mannheim – 1963), *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt* (Bronze Lajkonik at APSFF Krakow – 1964, honorary mention at the International Ethnographic and Sociological Film Festival in Florence – 1965, League of the German Democratic Republic for Friendship Among the Peoples Prize at IFF Oberhausen – 1965), *Leśni (The Forest People)* (Diploma of Recognition at the International Short Film Festival in Krakow – 1972, Polish Krzysztof Komeda Jazz Association Prize for Zygmunt Konieczny at APSFF Krakow – 1972), *I Am Looking at Your Photograph* (Grand Prix Golden Dragon at ISFF Krakow – 1979), *Death Album* (Honorary Diploma at IFF Leipzig – 1978), *Exodus* (Grand Prix Golden Lajkonik na APSFF Krakow – 1985, Special Honorary Prize Golden Lajkonik for Sylwester Braun “Kris” at APSFF Krakow – 1985).

<sup>55</sup> The interest in using photography in film not just as a testimony of the past, but as a way to access a special dimension of the reality, recently brought several noteworthy works, such as: Katarzyna Maciejko-Kowalczyk's *Benek blues* (1999), Andrzej Barański's *Fotografia*

*jest sztuką trudną (Photography Is a Difficult Art*, 1998), Dariusz Jabłoński's *Photographer* (1998) or Ireneusz Dobrowolski's *Portrecista (The Portraitist*, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> *Diaporama* – an audiovisual show whose components are still images in the form of slides projected on a screen and sound synchronised with the projection. The soundtrack can be any kind of enhancement of the author's expression (music, recorded sounds, a text read out, etc.). *Diaporama* is an integrated form of sound and music, which are designed as an inseparable whole. In effect we get an original form of artistic expression, positioned between independent film and separate presentations of photographs and sound pieces. One should also note that it is a mistake to regard diaporama as a slideshow with music playing in the background. Such a presentation of pretty pictures is simply called a slideshow. Technically, diaporama is a show (also large-scale, e.g. in cinemas) of slides screened from several (at least two) projectors, to achieve the effect of image blending. In the 1980s, Polish tandems of authors presented projections rich in content, using nine or even twelve integrated projectors. In the 1980s and 1990s many Polish artists, basing on their artworks, presented this form of artistic expression, which was completely new, given the possibilities of the time, and accessible to anyone dealing with photography or music; it was a forerunner of present day multimedia. <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaporama> (cf. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaporama> /accessed: 10.12.2013/).

<sup>57</sup> Edward Bryła at the Documentary Film Studio in Warsaw specialised in “mixed films” (with live action and elements of animation). He co-authored many films based on static photographs. In 1955 (so two years before *City of Gold* was made), he created photographic sequences for Kurt Weber's *Pod jednym niebem (Under One Sky)*, the first post-war documentary film about the Warsaw Ghetto. Already then, Bryła used various combinations of camera movements when filming the photos.

# *I'll get rid of my body*

On Marcin Koszałka's and Jerzy Nowak's *Being*

SEBASTIAN LISZKA

*It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.*

Oscar Wilde

*There is a motion present both in nature and in human being that is always crossing the borders and that could be reduced only in small part.*

Georges Bataille

Malicious tongues say that these days the hundreds of dead artists, authorities, scientists etc. buried in Krakow have more to say than those who actually live and work in Krakow nowadays. Krakow as seen in Marcin Koszałka's documentary is a dirty city with cracked, old buildings; this unpleasant view is far from the well known postcard pictures of colourful, renaissance sights. Even the views of Old Town Market Square or Wawel Castle seem intentionally spoiled by elements such as antennas, devastated roofs or poles around the Cracovia Stadium. The buildings and interiors filmed are dark, with little sunlight coming in through dirty windows, and mouldy green is the dominating colour they are filled. This image of a decaying city covered with mould, lichen, a film of humidity and age is similar to the way Luchino Visconti created his image of Venice. These unfamiliar views of Krakow make the symbolic borderlines of the story told in the film.

Jerzy Nowak is an actor. To be more specific it should be emphasized that he's an actor who had spent sixty years of his artistic carrier in Krakow. In his stage work as well as in the films he worked for the best Polish directors of his times: Swinarski, Wajda, Kieślowski. Still, Nowak laughs when he says that Koszałka's documentary is the first film in which he is about to be the main character. The collaboration of these two artists – the old actor and a relatively young filmmaker – results, according to press materials, from a common obsession: death. Nowak defines his obsession as the obsession with what he calls “the ultimate verdict”, an exact date of one's death encrypted and hidden in some special place or dimension. Koszałka is also obsessed with the idea of death, but it is death meant as a scandal of disintegration. His obsession concentrates on the fury death carries within itself when interrupting an average order of everyday existence, causing neurosis and anxiety. Those slightly different and partly shared views are the two poles between which the field of what is being said in the movie was created.

The final effect of this collaboration (which lasted for more than a year) was surprising to many. The film was expected to be scandalous and, as in Koszałka's previous film projects, breaking social taboos. Before the release there were also some voices criticizing Jerzy Nowak. The idea that the director will be with his character to his very last moments, filming his last months and consequently – his dying, with a final image of an autopsy performed on the actor's body as a lesson on medical academy – that seemed to many as morbid, disgracing, and outrageous. What *Being* was expected to be was simply an image of disrespect to human dignity, a proof of the main character's mental disease and/or an act of violence on the ethical standards of documentary film maker and the actor's profession.

The film opens with a view of Zakrzówek – a lagoon with an artificial lake created in a former quarry. Divided into exact halves, the frame shows deep water reflecting the sky. The camera is sweeping around in vertical motion from right to left – this type of motion is obviously alluding to the *contra passu*: moving counterclockwise, inversely, *contra naturam*. In such counterclockwise direction Dante was wandering through the infernal world. The association with Dante is not very far off as the next scene is an impressive presentation of the exhibits from the Florentine Museo La Specola. Images of beautiful, perfect bodies the colour of alabaster, opened and showing their viscera, intestines, femoral veins prepares the viewer for the strongest visual element in the film, that is the first scene taken in the Institute of Anatomy. In the Institute corpses immersed in formalin are kept in special steel tubs, a poor equivalent to sarcophagus. Bodies kept in the Institute are nothing like the Italian exhibits. As an employee of the Institute presents one of the cadavers we see that they make for an unpleasant view; they're darkened, shrunken, and appear wizened. The employee quickly washes the excess of formalin from the body and immediately covers the cadaver with a rag.

Then we see Jerzy Nowak. He is filmed during the summer holidays he spent with his wife. Next scenes link together in a kind of quasi-symbolic order: we see the actor while he's passing a bridge, when he's awkwardly trying to row the boat or walking in slow motion, as if he was about to face his final destination; the last frame shows him asleep. The impact of these very clear images grows even stronger as we hear Jerzy Nowak chatting naively with his wife Maria about life after death; Mrs. Nowak discusses her fear of the presumably imminent death of her husband, who is much older than she is. Simultaneously the actor is explaining the very core of his obsession. Those sincere and intimate confessions are divided by moments of the couple glancing at one another in mute silence. Once the Nowaks return from their holidays, Mr. Nowak has an appointment with a lawyer, during which Nowak declares his will to donate his dead body for scientific purposes. We learn (at the same time as he learns it) that once the body is donated it is also "discharged from any material use". We can presume that this is a kind of allusion that the body will be excluded from any symbolic use. It will be out of the market, out of what is common, and out-of-joint (using Jacques Derrida's term). In such a case the funeral understood as a symbolic exchange between the dead person and his relatives, can only take a ritualistic, symbolic form. The actor nods – accepting what he just heard.

Back in the Institute of Anatomy we can see further stages of the procedure. The corpses are covered and taken to another room. And in the another room we see another important person entering it, namely professor Konstanty Ślusarczyk,

a lecturer of the Institute. Camera focuses alternately on his face and his disfigured body. In this scene Professor is giving a lecture. He states that in the Institute death is useful and meaningful, that this is a place in which a person's death gives one the opportunity to teach others how to save a human life. His speech concentrates on the essence of the medical profession, which he sees as sharing medical knowledge that can save a life. And that it would be impossible without corpses being donated to the Institute.

In the next scene Nowak visits his parents' grave. He is visibly stirred. We learn that this is the place where he is likely to be buried. Then he talks to his friend, the composer Zygmunt Konieczny. Their conversation clarifies the question of the origin of the musical theme repeated throughout the movie. It is a melody composed by Konieczny to the collage of Stanisław Wyspiański's <sup>1</sup> poems. First we see the composer playing the theme on the piano, then we hear it performed by an orchestra in the studio, where the recording is being finalised.

The scene is cut with an intermission during which we are taken back in time. We can see Nowak training a candidate before an exam to the Krakow State Drama School. Then the scene smoothly shifts to a recording of a poem in a studio. Both the girl wanting to be an actress and the woman working as a radio presenter are not able to meet Nowak's expectations as to the interpretation of the poem. Suddenly, a musical piece appears with a rapid cut – camera is back in the Institute. Nowak is talking to professor Ślusarczyk. The professor briefs the actor on the procedures applied to the treatment of donated corpses.

The images that follow are rather surprising. Another interlocutor of our character is Jerzy Turbasa, a famous tailor. The conversation about choice and cut of a suit to be made in Mr Turbasa's workshop, runs in a calm and reflexive manner. Mr. Nowak needs a suit for his church wedding ceremony. The quiet, filled with simplicity and intensive emotions scene taken during the ceremony in the small church seems so different from what might have been expected by the spectator.

Nowak, just like the Little Prince from popular Antoine Saint-Exupery's novel, is visiting other places, other planets inhabited by friends. He pays a visit to his fellow actor Jerzy Adamski who is in a nursing house. The scene consist of a number of situations filmed during this visit. Adamski, an old man abandoned by his family tells his life-story remembers the years of his professional activity. He's also recites a poem by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński <sup>2</sup>. At the same time the dramatic tension of the scene is obtained by moments of meaningful silence, maybe embarrassing for spectators yet natural for these two people who had known one another for years. Another scene depicts New Year's Eve party mixed with images from Konstanty Ślusarczyk's class. Ślusarczyk, together with his students is examining the cadavers while continuing his speech on the basics of medical ethics.

Just after the New Year's day, Nowak visits another long-time friend, director and screenwriter Andrew Konic. At the moment Konic is staying at a sanatorium, grieving for his late son. To distract those mournful thoughts Nowak tells the director about the journey he recently made to Bogorodchany in Ukraine, the place where he was raised. The actor's father once was a mayor of the city. Instead of sentiment, Nowak's impressions are filled with bitterness: the land of his childhood is lost forever. And even though he met some people who still remembered those who used to live in Bogorodchany before the war, their memories are just plain

words. The images of the journey are introduced as a retrospective and partially substitute the spoken part of the story. Memories are also represented in arranged, black and white images depicting the interiors of Mayor's Office and its facade. Back in the sanatorium we see Konic commenting his friend's story with an opinion that such journeys are against the natural continuum of being, that they are only disturbing.

Next is the sequence of frames showing Nowak at the church or undergoing a specialist CT scan. The image of Nowak's motionless face is again somehow associated with the presence of death, passing, mortality. This impression is even stronger as it is followed by the frame from inside the Institute of Anatomy, where another body had just been delivered and now is being prepared. The viewers might very well think that it is the body of Jerzy Nowak. Then the series of shots: Nowak acknowledging professor Ślusarczyk for his help during the making the film. A prepared corpse is being immersed in a vat full of formalin. Students are taking their exam, body parts used during it are being put in special containers, some are thrown away as medical waste. Nowak is on a merry-go-round, he is watching his reflection in distorting mirrors, strolling with a little boy (probably his grandson).

The film is concluded with two scenes. The remains of the body used in the Institute are being put in a coffin. The remains are iso light that two gravediggers carry the coffin with no trace of weariness. The second frame is metaphorical: it presents Jerzy Nowak falling into a shallow swimming pool and swimming in it.

Although getting the permission to film an autopsy and anatomy class was not easy, we are not actually told that these scenes show something which is not usually meant to be seen by anyone except the very exclusive group of students and lecturers. Medicine is still an exceptional domain of knowledge accessible to only the few. It is also exceptional for it is a kind of combination of science, philosophy and art. The secrecy of medical knowledge is visible in some regulations present in statutes of many universities. It is quite usual that attending forensic medicine classes is restricted to medicine students only while all the other lectures are open to the public. For centuries the Catholic church had laws punishing any kind of examination of the dead human body. Nowadays, when medical art is no longer in danger of this kind, these regulations have only symbolic, ethical meaning. They suggest clearly that the dignity of human existence, including the dignity of the human body, requires special treatment and that cadavers should not be exposed only to satisfy one's curiosity.

Let this brief encounter with medical discourse mark our first attempt to deal with analysis of the meaning of Koszałka's work. I would like to focus on one gesture, that is on the movement of professor Ślusarczyk's hand leading his student's hand, showing her the way inside the human body. They are getting inside the human being. This transgression is one of a complex nature, as the cadaver is no longer a human being, a person, yet it is still a sign of human being, as the body is what remains of a man who passed away. Even more important is that the body was donated voluntarily by a person who believed in the sense of scientific research. The professor's speech discussing those matters, is distorted by the disfigurement of his body, the speech itself is also chaotic, but it only makes what is said sound deeper. These simple words contain the very essence of the idea of humanism, the core idea of medicine as an art of saving human life is accompanied by

the simple observation that the use of donated bodies, learning through exploring real human organism may be the only good thing resulting from one's death. The image of the Professor's crippled body bent down over cadavers might be seen as a symbolic figure, a modern *Pietà*. I suppose that it is no other way to describe this scene than by evoking the idea of the sublime.

The classical model of the sublime, as described by Burke and Kant<sup>3</sup>, states that there is a relation between it and the subject; first it terrifies the subject and overpowers it, then the influence of it stimulates the rise of the inner power which is finally to overcome the impact of the external. The sublimation as described above is present in different moments during the movie and is a power that elicits and establishes several different subjects. One of them is of course the Professor who works with corpses on day-to-day basis, another is Jerzy Nowak who is shown the cadavers inside the tubs; the third subject is the spectator himself, who is also the first subject forced to be confronted with the view of the cadavers. The shocking impact of discussed images is reduced by Koszałka as the first images to be seen present wax anatomical figures from the Florentine museum and only after that, one sees a corpse being literally thrown onto the dissecting table. Emotionally stirred by what is witnessed, the spectator experiences a kind of awakening. Yet it would be wrong to state that this awakening is provoked by the sudden presence of the figure of death coming from extra-diagenetic order and its consequences. The main stimulus is the eye-contact with the dead, abandoned bodies. Cadaver seems left behind, an object with no form; an anonymous corpse reveals its ontological independence from the human body. There is no isomorphism between a cadaver and the living body, between the human body and the body left behind, or quoting Adam Mickiewicz, the body one "took off".

Further procedures seen in the film, which are: the detailed explanations given by a lawyer, Nowak's act of signing away his own body, meeting the Professor and listening to his explanations about the procedures applied in the Institute of Anatomy, and finally burying what is left of the body after it was used in the Institute, reveal great effort of many people who are making their best to create a proper order in the situation of the renunciation of the body. "Getting rid of", "abandoning", "renunciation" – no matter how we call this act, what matters is the fact that this entire process is modern and secular, it is being carried out by specialists and described in specialist discourses of medicine, ethics and law. What happens, happens between the people, it is designed by the people for the people, all of those regulations and procedures are free of the element of the sacrum. The lack of the supernatural, or the agnostic (or merely atheistic) character of Nowak's decision might be surprising as it is not usual for this kind of narrative to be free of religious aspects.

The idea of the body, as it is discussed in the movie, is never associated with the idea of divine creation. More, there is not a single word about the sense, vocation or even soul. Finally, there is a question of the title; the word "being" is ambiguous, there are no obvious clues how to establish correlations between the language of metaphysics and this concrete film. This being present in every aspect of the film and connecting these dimensions altogether into one whole is neither something which makes the situations and problems meaningful, nor is it an instrument of sublimation, nor even is it a source of any help. Being is just a bare

fact (one of the characters calls it an “average human thing”). This intensity of the circumferential reality was developed by strict and very original organization of space. Everything we witness is taking place in Krakow<sup>4</sup> with the highest point on the top of the tower of Saint Mary’s church and the lowest being the surface of the lake on Zakrzówek (there is also the surface of the shallow pool Nowak is swimming through – we’ll say more about this scenes below). The space narrowed to one single city is a factor of the limitations of existence, still at the same time it is also a factor of metaphorical image of human existence. Yet this metaphorical process consists of what is not seen on the surface; it is a creation of inclusive space, out of worldly order, in a way a-temporal, surely not related to current social and political situation. There’s no way this space could be an arena for any human *agon* with Fate, Life, Meaning, God, Evil or Good. Neither is this space filled with lacking; it is not the world abandoned by God, a world coming to its end, marked with some kind of an error, craving or longing. The film is nothing more than a pure record of reality as it was visible. Death and leaving are natural and specifically human domains. Opposite to Walter Benjamin’s idea there is no difference between the matter of what is being lived-through and the matter of experience<sup>5</sup>. Continuous presence of death combined with specific course of time make this film also impossible to be interpreted as just an illustration of Heideggerian idea of *sein-zum-Tode*. All such attempts to dissolve the being (and the Being) in the meta-theoretical philosophical discourse or to over-interpret the movie are prevented by just one sentence we hear from one of the characters: *It is life that counts, life itself and only life*. One might say that the quoted sentence sounds trite. Maybe that is true, still this one sentence makes any unilateral interpretations impossible to develop.

As we can see from the above, what seems to be important (not only as corporeality) is the relation established between the man – the body – the cadaver. The entire film is based on this fundamental difference between Jerzy Nowak – the human being and Jerzy Nowak’s body. The importance of Nowak’s profession – it is clear that he’s a prominent actor – remains an open question. As an actor Nowak has strong difficulties with remaining neutral to the camera, he can’t help to stop acting, performing, the documentary character of the film once in a while is being disrupted. It is clearly visible in the scenes showing conversations. Voices of Nowak’s interlocutors sound more natural and they are not as clear as the voice of an actor who sounds clear and strong even when what he is saying are platitudes and clichés. The director from time to time attempts to subordinate Nowak to the camera, for example in quasi-transitions when Nowak is inefficiently rowing the boat, passing the bridge, staring into the space with an empty look on his face, in the moments of mute silence, finally – when he is asleep. The distinction separating an actor from a person, a performer from someone filmed in neutral situations is hard to mark. This duality results in scenes filmed incorrectly from the point of view of a documentalist; among others, such premeditated mistakes are made in the scene of Nowak’s conversation with Konic (Nowak’s pose is dramatic, unnatural) or in those sequences when daily routine is being presented without any commentary – the commentary is made by the spectator, inside his own head.

Polyphonic, varied narrative is one of Marcin Koszałka’s hallmarks. In *Being* this complexity is almost garish, as there is one more dimension added on the meta-level of the film language. I mean the fact that *Being* is also a film depicting the

making of a film. One hears Nowak discussing a film on his dying, witnesses his chatting with the composer about the soundtrack composed for that movie, that film is a subject of the conversation between Nowak and Konic. Also the mentioned above non-documentary, fully directed sequences showing the District Office in Bogorodchany, Nowak alone, Nowak in the pool – they all seem to be materials made for that “other” film. That “other” film was sure never meant to be really made; the non-existing film widely criticized a year before it was released; film which some journalists warned about before anyone had even seen it.

Of course there are other ways to define Koszałka's film technique. There is something very specific about his strategy of making things visible. Koszałka's idea is to show something by not-showing it; not-showing becomes showing-otherwise. Let us once again recollect opening frames presenting naturalistic wax models of bodies revealing their insides. They are shocking – but only for a while. They are like real, yet they are not real at all. This confrontation with paradoxical representation is neutralizing the shock caused by the view of real corpse just a while later. Similar means are used to present Zakrzówek. The landscape around the lake is dark, formidable, it immediately brings one to thoughts of death and Nowak's obsession with “the ultimate verdict”. And all of a sudden those sinister, gruesome pictures are replaced with the images from inside of the church where the Nowaks are getting married. Framed this way frightening visions are no longer disturbing. There are several scenes in which the director pans the spectator. For example the scene where it appears that we are witnessing the moment of Nowak's death and yet in the next scene Nowak is still alive and apparently in a very good shape. There is enough of such scenes to elicit intended effect, but there are no more than it is necessary. It is really impossible to accuse Koszałka of any kind of excess.

*Being* conceals one more mystification: apparently Koszałka is directing his narrative in a way that suggests that Jerzy Nowak is dead. From this point Koszałka is creating a suggestive illusion of himself being left alone with all the collected material while his character is no longer alive, like the director was the keeper of the memory Jerzy Nowak. Ambivalence that results from such a manipulation is at the very core of the entire film.

Alongside with the slow passing of Jerzy Nowak another passing takes place. We can easily identify Nowak with a cultural code that does not exist outside of Nowak's generation. Nowak himself is very kind in an old fashioned way, the reverence he treats women with is from another time, another world that passed and is never to return. If we look closely we may find many other signs of presence of this cultural formation. We find those signs on the surface (for example Konieczny was a long time collaborator with the legendary cabaret Piwnica pod Baranami), in our associations (cadavers look just like the mannequins created by Tadeusz Kantor for his spectacles in the so called “theatre of death” period), finally, in the deep layers of cultural continuum with roots in the first three decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century – in meditations on the time lost echoing Marcel Proust or Bruno Schulz. Presented contexts all belong to a highly modernistic paradigm, and as such they mark the film itself, its aesthetics and characters. But there is something unusual about the kind of modernism emanating through Koszałka's documentary. What I would like to emphasise is the role of life, of living. Different aspects of vitality are hardly noticeable, they are distributed throughout the film but remain fundamental to its

meaning. They are also not entangled in external contexts: Stanisław Wyspiański's poem recited several times is not a key to the hermetic, hidden meaning or a message encoded in the web of signs. It is not a code of substitution; it is a code legible to the people portrayed in the movie, it is their private way of communicating with one another and if it remains unclear, unexplained that is because it has nothing to do with the subject of the film. Still, it is what represents life itself: vivid speech, communication, sharing of a cultural code. The aesthetics of the visual are also convergent with the state of characters' consciousness. Koszałka remained deeply aware of the importance of compatibility between different layers of work.

Nowak's point of view is revealed widely in the Ukrainian sequence. Nostalgia accompanying the recollection of the journey is contrasted with tough recapitulation that what is gone is gone forever, there is no way back to the world as it was. In Wyspiański's words:

*It is such a long time since I've given up  
On dreams of the paradise lost* <sup>6</sup>.

In my opinion this imagination, with no doubt founded on modernistic base, is not of modernistic genus. Its genesis reaches further than modernism, romanticism or 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment. It is more of what notable historian of Polish literature, late professor Jan Błoński named a "stubborn persistence of the baroque". Baroque as a category of cultural order seems to me as relevant to symbolic structure of *Being* for several reasons. Nowak, for instance, it is suggested, descends from an aristocratic, noble family. Highly rhetorical character of depicted relations between people, their meaningful gestures, theatrical form of expression – that is clearly what is inherited from baroque. From this point of view Nowak's childish deliberations on heaven and hell sound as entwined with morbid and ludicrous poetry of Józef Baka <sup>7</sup>.

Although we are still discussing a documentary it is obvious that the film, containing several feature elements, might be as well analysed as a work of art. By shedding light on the baroque patterns in the narrative we reveal other spheres of meaning. What is fictional and what is documentary grow from one root. All the scenes, one by one, might be seen as a motion picture of *danse macabre*. Every single person one sees is involved in the great chain of death, an ageing actor as well as the student of medicine learning to consider cadaver not as a piece of dead meat, but material remainder of human existence. Baroque *modi* of creating and re-creating the reality are based on acts of saving material aspect of things and happenings from perishing. Ananke, the goddess of fate and necessity is not welcomed to this world. Yet she is waiting calmly for the right time to come. She is waiting on the edge of the swimming pool.

The last scene of *Being* needs a separate periphrasis. The camera, submerged in the shallow pool, is observing Jerzy Nowak as he is falling into the water with his whole body, swimming using his arms and then just drifting peacefully. This scene is mesmerizing. It is hard to forget. It makes a splendid coda sewing all the elements of the film together and also saving it from sinking in modernistic mannerism. This image establishes third great metaphor of life present in Koszałka's film. The first is the idea of life as a theatre, of living-as-performing (emphasis on

performative acts such as getting married or signing a will). The second metaphor is the image of life as a great journey (Nowak visiting his close ones, friends and relatives, the living and the dead). Swimming creates the third and final metaphor.

Nowak's body, tacit, inconspicuous and small resembles a tadpole or a tiny frog drifting on the surface. An allusion to Wisława Szymborska's poem *In Heraclitus' River* might seem far too obvious:

*In Heraclitus' river*  
*a fish fishes for a fish,*  
*a fish quarters a fish with a sharp fish,*  
*a fish builds a fish, a fish lives in a fish,*  
*a fish escapes from a besieged fish.*

*In Heraclitus' river*  
*a fish loves a fish,*  
*your eyes – says she – glitter like fishes in the sky,*  
*I want to swim together with you to the common sea,*  
*oh, most beautiful of the school of fish.*

*In Heraclitus' river*  
*a fish invented a fish beyond fish,*  
*a fish kneels before a fish, a fish sings to a fish,*  
*asks a fish for an easier swim.*

*In Heraclitus' river*  
*I, the sole fish, I, a fish apart*  
*(say, from the fish tree and the fish stone)*  
*at certain moments tend to write small fish*  
*in silver scales so briefly,*  
*that could it be the darkness is winking in embarrassment?*<sup>8</sup>

According to the poet, “the other fish” from Heraclitus' river, same as any other fish is able only to designate the borderlines of its own existence. Quoting Szymborska's poem we face the question of the form of existence as shown in the last scene of *Being*. One could see it as Heideggerian throwing a being into its existence, no matter that it is shallow and monochrome as it is the only possible one. On the other hand, the scene could be understood as a negative epiphany – or an epiphany of negativity. As such it shall be nothing more but a manifestation of emptiness or nonentity. There is no (deep or illusionary) truth to be unveiled, nothing to learn, not a single clue which way to go.

But the super-mundane, celestial post-modern beauty of this scene contains a suggestion to take the opposite direction. Distorted, diffused light, focusing on the aura, laying emphasis on the unsaid and then darkening – all these means are used to multiply possible meanings instead of giving any definite answers. Final frames reunite what was divided, it is an act of repealing (the Hegelian *Aufhebung*). *Being* is merged into one, even if it turns out to be absurd. Reunion of all aspects of being as we see it is not a metaphysical conclusion. Conclusions do not fold in any ethical or metaphysical project. It is just a story of being, a story of one old

body in its last days and as such, Koszałka's work finds a way to every single spectator unless he lost his ability to remain sensitive. The kind of sensitivity need is left undefined. We do not know whether it is absolute, religious, ethical or aesthetic? Those questions are left unanswered.

What more can one expect from a documentary?

SEBASTIAN LISZKA

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<sup>1</sup> Stanisław Wyspiański (1869-1907) was a Polish playwright, poet, painter and architect. As one of the main early modernists (he was a member of Young Poland movement) and a devoted patriot Wyspiański created symbolistic, often hermetic works. His stage writings and poetry concentrate on national themes and frequently have prophetic character. Wyspiański spent his life in Krakow. His major drama, *Acropolis* is a series of visionary, mythological and biblical scenes taking place inside the King's Chapel on the Wawel Castle.

<sup>2</sup> Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński (1905-1953) was a notable Polish poet of 30s and 50s. In his youth Gałczyński was close to the right-wing, fascist movement. After being released from the stalag and coming back to Poland Gałczyński became loyal to new authorities and wrote several poems in the socialist realist convention. Czesław Miłosz depicted Gałczyński in his famous *Captive Mind* as “Delta”. One of Gałczyński's most acclaimed poems, *Magical Carriage* is a love poem set in Krakow; the city is described as place of magic and wonder.

<sup>3</sup> See also: I. Kant, *The Critique of Judgement. Second Book: Analytic of the Sublime*, translated with Introduction and Notes by J. H. Bernard, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised, London 1914. Kant defines such *stimulation* as *affections* (*energetic, sensitive*) and *feelings* (*brave or gentle*). Burke's idea of sublime is connected with what Kant would call a negative affection: the *urge for self-preservation* and *fear* and as it is so, what is sublime is connected to what is *empirical*. As we can see in the description above, mentioned scene contains a suggestion of co-existing of both aspects of death being at the same time two sources of sublime: Kant's

*transcendental* and Burke's *empirical* sublimation.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Institute of Anatomy is actually in Zabrze, not in Krakow, as well as the sanatorium where Nowak was visiting Andrzej Konic is in a different city, yet it is not indicated in any way.

<sup>5</sup> See also: W. Benjamin, *Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire* in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band I.1, Herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schwepenhäuser*, Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main, 1974. According to Benjamin, an *event* can be assumed for consciousness only *momentarily*, that is without any relation to the space-time and as such it is something close to the *shock*. It is clear that when it comes to *Being* no such thing occurs and yet we're still coping with modern and secular vision of reality.

<sup>6</sup> S. Wyspiański, *Wybór poezji*, Kraków 1979, p. 19. Trans. by M. Placzek.

<sup>7</sup> Józef Baka (1707-1780) was a Jesuit priest and a prominent author of highly imaginative, usually strictly rhymed poetry. His writings consist rhymed treatise on death, several latin occasional poems composed for Baka's protectors, commentaries on Loyola's works and many other. In the past misunderstood and recognised as ridiculous scribbler, nowadays Baka is considered to be an author of masterpieces of Polish and Lithuanian baroque.

<sup>8</sup> Translated by Joanna Trzeciak, source <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1221626.ece> (accessed: 16.12.2013). Compare bilingual edition: W. Szymborska, *Nothing Twice. Selected Poems / Nic dwa razy. Wybór wierszy*, transl. S. Barańczak, C. Cavanagh, Kraków 1997, pp. 52-53.

# Between Fact and Fiction

Documentary telenovela, or docusoap Polish style

BEATA KOSIŃSKA-KRIPPNER

The Polish documentary telenovela was influenced by the advent of the then new hybrid genre, docusoap, in the European television market, a genre which became increasingly successful and popular from the 1990s onwards. The first two telenovelas (*Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* /Nano Dragović and Grzegorz Siedlecki, TVP2, 1999/ and *Pierwszy krzyk* /Wojciech Szumowski, TVP1, 1999/) both created by Stanisław Krzemiński, answered a demand for the docusoap in Poland. Stanisław Krzemiński, who in 1998 consulted for the German docusoap *Flughafen* (ZDF), said: *For years my natural habitat as a producer was a documentary film-making, and because a docusoap was gaining in prominence across Europe, I began preparations to do one such form* <sup>1</sup>.

Ideas related to a twenty-nine-episode series had been discussed as early as 1996, with the production beginning in 1998 when Nina Terentiew, then the director of the TVP2, took on the risk of financing the project. In this respect the Polish beginnings are different to the United Kingdom, the docusoap's cradle, where broadcasters have encouraged the production companies to develop this genre. The Polish series *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* may have been influenced in its development by British docusoaps such as *Children's Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), or *Great Ormond Street Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), both of which followed the experiences of staff and patients in well known children's hospitals. Knowing that such programmes had been successful with UK audiences, Grzegorz Siedlecki and his colleagues approached the production of their docusoaps with an optimistic caution: *We have made three episodes in the first instance, recalls Siedlecki: The producers knew the docusoap was popular in the West, but it was unclear if the genre will become popular [in Poland] too, even if we used the 'secure' motifs. So e.g. we showed the hospital and a kidney transplantation that a wife gave to her husband* <sup>2</sup>.

When work on the series was completed, the producers announced on their website: *Documentary telenovela – this is a yet unknown genre for the Polish spectators* <sup>3</sup>. Andrzej Fidyk, then director of the document division of Polish Television, became the godfather of the documentary telenovela. *While participating in international conferences, it was my impression that the world went bonkers about the new genre. We had decided to make our own docusoap, said Fidyk* <sup>4</sup>.

We can also guess that *Pierwszy Krzyk* was inspired by the 1998 docusoap *Liverpool Mums* (C5 Bazal), about Liverpool's maternity hospital, or the similarly themed German *Gubertsstation* (Arte, 1999). Szumowski insisted, however, that *Pierwszy Krzyk* is not a straightforward imitation: *We have chosen the place and theme purposefully, because giving birth always ignites emotions. We were right – when the baby's situation was insecure, or when the mother had to go to a shelter*

*for single mothers, the phones were ringing like crazy – people wanted to help. BBC only had its first series about birth-giving two years after us* <sup>5</sup>.

Docusoap has contributed to transforming the landscape of contemporary television. First emerging in the UK during the mid-1990s, the genre was taken on in other countries, becoming very popular in, for example, Germany. There is broad agreement that the term ‘docusoap’ was first used by M. McFadyean to describe the hybrid nature of the British-Australian series *Sylvania Waters* (ABC-BBC, Paul Watson, 1992) <sup>6</sup>. Elsewhere, McFadyean wrote: *The series appeals to us with a charm of a soap opera, the irony of a satire, and with the documentary’s brutality of everyday life. We could call it docusoap* <sup>7</sup>. Docusoap is one of the border genres <sup>8</sup>, emerging as a by-product of the media market situation in Europe. Public television needed to be revitalised to successfully compete with commercial broadcasters. Although not popular, documentary filmmaking was valued by broadcasters as a means of fulfilling their public mission. To survive, it had to reinvent itself as did the prime time fiction and entertainment. One way of gaining viewership was to offer so called “mirror television”, focused on the reproduction of reality. In the BBC, factual multi-episode series, which were depicting histories of “ordinary people” in entertaining ways, were well received and inoffensive. They borrowed their style and dramaturgy tricks from fiction films and series. British producers saw huge potential in popular, fact-based entertainment.

The docusoap forms have been variously described as borderline, hybrid, factual, or docufictional. Each term is justified, because each encompasses diverse examples, even if at times they partially overlap. What unifies these forms is that they can be characterised by temporality, instability, elements of playfulness and auto-depreciation – the elements characteristic for the post-documentary era, when the audiences are taught to receive new factual forms, while not forgetting about relativity, causality, and opportunism of a truth. Although viewers are engaged in increasingly complex readings of documentaries and other factual forms, we may encounter some for whom seeing is believing. These viewers are interested in fact-based genres, which by definition do not offer anything else but entertainment.

According to Margaret Lünenborg, docusoap emerged thanks to a combination of technical, social, and economic factors surrounding media. Video-recording equipment has become increasingly affordable, leading to a growth in the popularity of home video-making and the use of webcams. These dynamics lead to a blurring of the private/public division in media discourses <sup>9</sup>. Economic conditions, according to Lünenborg, could be named *new economy of the document*, depicting *global non-fictional industry, and its constant instability* <sup>10</sup>. Hachmeister builds on Lünenborg’s work, arguing that whilst documentary films were initially considered a niche genre, more recently they have become a globally attractive marketing product, yet to be internationally standardised. While ideas, concepts, and formats of documentary are explored and acculturated, structures and histories seem to remain rooted in national and linguistic contexts. Lünenborg also notices that viewers’ changing expectations stimulate the emergence of new documentary forms. Consequently, documentary films needed new formats and rhythms to fit well into routines of serial television <sup>11</sup>, as differences between reality and the spectacle, and stories and non-fictional films and television <sup>12</sup> seemed to disappear. In the popular imagination, documentaries became part of the border genres, and these in turn are

subject to the first law of the “post-documentary” era *Entertain!*<sup>13</sup> Since the mid-1990s there has been an increase in the use of the documentary discourse in ways that depart from classical documentary aims; the genre is now used for the entertainment<sup>14</sup>.

Docusoap refers to a television series that mixes observational documentary filmmaking with elements of a soap opera. Here is the recipe for the docusoap according to the producer Andrew Bethell: *Take any aspect of British life – It could be shopping, parking, traveling, eating, pet-care or clubbing. Find a contained location where a manageable cast of characters will engage in these activities or, more importantly, interact with the Great British Public. Keep an eye out for the one or two characters who will become your “stars”... It is not essential, but in the first few episodes you will need at least one shouting match and the commentary, “unfortunately all did not go well for Tracy...” That is about it*<sup>15</sup>.

Dorothy Hobson called docusoap a child of the soap opera<sup>16</sup>. Soap opera offered the reality of documentary genre characterised by the *mundane*. This contrasted with traditional documentary genre, which presented reality as special and exquisite, exploring the lives of unusual and interesting people, always with a pedagogical twist. Docusoap depends on “usual” and historically and globally unimportant events and phenomena, looking at small histories and uncharacteristic people without achievement or merit. Digging out these small histories requires a great deal of creativity, with more active interventions as routes to access than would be accepted in traditional documentary filmmaking. Jeremy Mills, who co-produced *Airport* (BBC1, 1996) and *Driving School* (BBC1, 1997) (both named by Richard Kilborn as the golden standard of the future docusoap<sup>17</sup>), said the following about the function of the protagonist in the docusoap: *The series was structured around characters who didn't have big stories to tell, but rather around big characters with small stories to tell... In the past we'd thought you really had to have a really big story to hold the audience's attention, but now we realized the opposite: quite light individual stories could be worked into an entertaining narrative mix*<sup>18</sup>. And here's his comment on the editing of both series: *It is not observational in the traditional sense... It is more interfering and anticipatory... You have to be able to predict the character's response to a particular situation, and you have to come up with the appropriate trigger questions, – question you will have to ask to get those wonderful one-liners that make [the film] funny, or explain the narrative*<sup>19</sup>.

What is important for the new forms and genres of “reality television”, including docusoap, is sensation, and the use of emotive elements. Elisabeth Klaus and Stephanie Lücke<sup>20</sup> have described the staging strategies typical for the reality TV, using docusoap as the umbrella term for diverse types of programmes, a practice typical for many German academics. Therefore we can also relate their description to the docusoap and to the documentary telenovela, as it is sometimes understood in more narrow terms. The main characteristics of docusoap are: personalization (the importance of a protagonist in delivering the narration/story); emotionality (reinforces the previous, and further engages viewers in the storyline); intimization (filming chosen elements of the protagonist's private life to uncover their character and motives; stimulates voyeuristic desires in viewers, and at the same time satisfies them); stereotyping (showing only selected aspects of protagonist's character); dramatization (artificially created moments of tension, additionally reinforced by-

motional tone). Consequently, documentary telenovela often crosses the boundaries of private life and exposes intimate behaviour, something not often shown before the era of “reality television”.

In the past protagonists could be part of the reportage, summarising or analysing a certain situation, focusing on “hot” topics of the contemporary world. That is why certain current social issues are shown through the prism of the protagonist’s life, and why filmmakers sometimes showed moments of emotional strain and tension, irritation, bitterness, or sadness. As is seen, for example, in the 1960-1970s series *Polska zza siódmej miedzy* (Maciej Szumowski), where we watch dramatic scenes featuring a hysterically screaming woman throwing herself under the incoming tractor. In times of difficulty, Szumowski was trying to show life without propagandist camouflage or auto-censorship. He cared about the truthfulness and authenticity of the message, occasionally using emotionally fuelled scenes.

Many years later, on the wave of political transformations, and in effect of the new modes of representation, intimacy, growing older, anger, repulsion, aggression, pain, bitterness, poverty, and disempowerment of the individual, found their place in the documentaries of Ewa Borzęcka (*Trzynastka*, 1996; *Arizona*, 1997; *Oni*, 1999; *Damsko-męskie sprawy*, 2001; *U Danusi*, 2002) and Marcin Koszałka (*Takiego pięknego syna urodziłam*, 1999; *Jakoś to będzie*, 2004). Each film offered the protagonists a chance to “play it out” in front of the camera in the form of an “emotional striptease”. Although not necessary for purposes of conveying the intended message, this dynamic gave way to an uncontrolled flow of words and gestures. This provoked doubt and controversy, with many viewers and commentators reading Borzęcka and Koszałka’s documentaries as exhibitionist and voyeuristic, manipulative and abusive. The Polish documentary telenovela emerged along with documentaries that broke many taboos.

This is not to say that Polish viewers were not acquainted with the televised form of serialised reality television. We can consider 1977-1978 *Dzień po dniu: Kędzierzyn Koźle* and *Dzień po dniu: Puławy* by Jerzy Śladkowski and Stanisław Krzemiński to be the precursors of the documentary telenovela in Poland. These series had a typical docusoap structure: the same protagonists followed for weeks, and their adventures were showed in the episodic series. Stanisław Krzemiński, who after years returned to this form with the *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* said: *similar ideas circulated among the documentary filmmakers, although our documentarians didn’t know about the existence of “The Family” or “The American Family”*<sup>21</sup>. Naturally, nobody used the term docusoap or documentary telenovela in the context of *Dzień po dniu*, but these films were very close to these genres. Shooting of the six-episodes of season one took two and a half months; the second season took three months. *It was the luxury of the situation we had back then [during communism]. TVP didn’t have a competition. Nobody looked at the economic factors as scrupulously as it is done today. Of course, the series was polluted by the specificity of the public television of the time; the commentary was often detached from the reality, it was not possible to rise certain topics like lack of work, depression, etc. However, in the one about Kędzierzyn Koźle we managed to trick the censorship. We made the headline: “Editors have received the letter. I live in Kędzierzyn Koźle, and I want to escape from here, there’s nothing to do, no prospects for life”. Of course we wrote it, but it was also true that we used to receive similar letters. And*

*we used it as the formal introduction. The propagandist elements were those showing that one can find their place in a similar town, that there were fascinating people living there. But our trick also revealed certain climate to the extent, it was possible back then* <sup>22</sup>.

The first Polish docusoap focuses on the action taking place at Szpital im. Dzieciątka Jezus (Baby Jesus Hospital), the first Medical University Hospital in Warsaw. From October to November 1998, filmmakers were researching the hospital by conducting hundreds of interviews with patients and doctors. Then, having chosen the protagonists, the team filmed for eight weeks. The show aired in February 1999. The actors are the real people: doctors and nurses, patients with real health problems, stress, victories and losses. The camera follows them at home, on their way to the hospital, in the hospital. It observes the patients preparing for treatments, operations, and routine screenings. The protagonists included Marek, who was operated several times after an accident; haemophiliac Roman; Mr Stanisław who had palate cancer; and a seventeen-year-old girl who gave birth to a child she initially did not want, but who subsequently embraced maternity under the influence of the hospital's friendly atmosphere. There were several reasons to choose the hospital as the place of action. Firstly, because the genre relies on emotions, and these are in the abundance in hospitals – suffering, fear, sadness of illness and the joy of recovery. Also because the events shown may become part of everyone's life, so the programme works like a mirror, allowing easy identification. It is rumoured that Grzegorz Siedlecki also wanted to show his gratitude to doctors, who helped him when he was in a critical situation. Nano Dragović, on the other hand, was rumoured to have intentions of helping people to believe and not loose hope; and to know what to expect from doctors and hospitals. Stanisław Krzemiński said: *Hospital is a good place for a dramaturgy. There are two places interesting to me: either hospital, or private funeral home. There is an abundance of emotions in the latter case, but it is an untouchable topic in our culture.* The producers looked for a location near Warsaw, and have spoken with at least twenty directors of hospitals. They have visited eight, and finally chosen the Szpital im. Dzieciątka Jezus, as it was there where the staff fully understood the intentions of the filmmakers. They trusted the producers that the intention was not to show gore, but to focus on the human fate and the hard work of the hospital's staff. Krzemiński said: *They took a risk, but the open mind of the hospital's director was decisive. Others were unconvinced, as it was something new, and they had to trust total strangers* <sup>23</sup>. After the filming started, the team followed all new patients, choosing those they found most interesting who were also keen on the project. The producer expressed his regret they hadn't had enough means to have several teams following different protagonists, as was the case in *Great Ormond Street Hospital*. As we read on the producer's website: *The camera watches the hospital's patients and doctors – their emotions and life developments are the true topic of the film. In our series we care about the psychological, not sensational, aspects of each story. We mustn't shock people with the tragedies. The true fabric of films is made of "being together" rather than of waiting for the drama to happen. The hospital is a backdrop, and not an agent, of the presented human fate. We have patients undergoing transplants, we meet girls undergoing complicated spine operations, and together with their parents, we unite in joyful celebrations of the doctor's*

wedding, and dread about the future of the abandoned newborn baby. We are together with our protagonists in their houses, and then we travel with them to the hospital<sup>24</sup>. Different opinions appeared in the newspapers. Film critic, Tadeusz Sobolewski wrote: *In the case of "Szpital...", the plot is the one of the illness and recovery. Szpital... at times resembles some documentaries of Kieślowski. (...) The aim is not to peep at life, but to find its order and make sense of it, to build the relation with the protagonists. In the Polish School of Documentary, there was always an idea behind the snippets of reality. Here, the situation is similar. Apart of the dramatic tension – each moment brings another endangerment of life – film offers hope and serenity*<sup>25</sup>.

Anita Piotrowska in "Tygodnik Powszechny" praised the series' lack of pedagogical ambitions, and the unwillingness to exploit difficult issues. However, she critiqued the avoidance of problematic topics, well known from our own experiences, and widely reported on newspaper front pages. But she also explained that these series do not hold any intentions of revealing the truth, hence the lack of attention to such issues as patient's dissatisfaction, bribery, and the everlasting shortage of supplies. For her: *The true value of the series like "Szpital Dześciątka Jezus" stems not from their documentary validity, but from abandoning the staging, also emotional one. And most importantly, our [viewers] "role" in such shows is not only that of a voyeur. In hospital, when we partake in the painful experiences together with protagonists, we encounter that which is not present in our everyday lives, that which is pushed aside as a taboo. [That which is] not always fitting well into the advertised world of people always beautiful, always healthy, and happy. When watching the "Szpital..." we are dislocated into the world, which we would rather avoid*<sup>26</sup>.

Mirosław Pęczak criticised the dialogues as artificial, but admitted that the film's value lies in our ability to see patient's nervousness before the operation, or a crying mother at the sight of her daughter with spine problems. We do not doubt these emotions<sup>27</sup>. Still, Katarzyna Jabłońska from "Więź" criticised the series for unnecessary naturalism, evident in, for example, a long shot of a cut through a protagonist's hand. *[Why to do it] when it is possible to show the doctor's difficulty in operating, patient's excruciating pain, and the overall dramaturgy of the happening without gore; why to show all this? It is enough to recall "Szpital" by Krzysztof Kieślowski*<sup>28</sup>. Wiesław Godzic, writing few years later than the original airing of the series, senses a lack of good taste and possible legal infringements during scenes like the therapeutic session of the teenage girl who was awaiting kidney transplant<sup>29</sup>.

Between 1998-1999 when the first episodes of the *Szpital...* were already edited, Andrzej Fidyk as the producer began working on the *Pierwszy krzyk* (aired September 05, 1999). *Pierwszy krzyk*, based on the original idea of Wojciech Szumowski, told a story of several families expecting children. Produced for TVP 1, it is mainly located in the hospital, but the team has also assisted some of the families at their homes, creating household diaries just before giving birth. The series shows the tragic histories of unwanted new-borns and babies rejected by their parents, as well as stories about children who were much welcomed into loving families. Before Andrzej Fidyk proposed Szumowski do this series, Fidyk and the hospital's director pondered the possibility that the filmmakers may cross the line. The team was assisting protagonists in the pre-natal care school, during consulta-

tions with doctors, at family visits and meetings, or while decorating the baby's room, and finally during the delivery. It was for the first time ever that a Polish director entered the room during one of the most intimate experiences of human life<sup>30</sup>. *We know that this will be an interesting topic to our viewers. There is no other experience, perhaps except of death, that would be common to all people. It was important that the series remains engaging to the viewers*<sup>31</sup>, said Wojciech Szumowski.

He also added that the series was a challenge to him, as it is not easy to recall real stories from one episode to another. *Pierwszy krzyk* was shot in the Szpital im. R. Czerwiakowskiego (Siemiradzki Street, Krakow), referred to by local residents as the "Siemiradzkiego Hospital". *The title came to my mind when I overheard the doctor's explanation in some of the material we have had just shot. [Doctor said:] "First scream is the first breath of a child, who catches the air and unknots the lungs, previously tighten up in the mother's womb". I thought it was fascinating – catching the breath as catching the life – said the director.* The moment of birth is usually very emotional and joyous for parents, and Szumowski's team tried to film it in a considerate manner. It can be said that the decision to make the series was influenced by foreign productions, and a wish to respond to the challenges of global media trends. According to promotional materials, Polish Television was very aware that "documentary series", as it was called, is a fashionable genre gaining international consumers, and often winning over feature films and entertainment programmes. But among the commentators, *Pierwszy krzyk* raised mixed reactions. The same aspects and characteristics of the series, especially the approach to ethics, led to it being both condemned and prized. In retrospect, Tadeusz Pikulski called it a brave attempt at educating men and doctors. He wrote: *Birth-giving was so far an extremely intimate event. Now we could appreciate it in full beauty. A taboo was broken, the act of birth giving was desacralized; it was pure physiognomy that we dealt with. On the other hand, the film showed a birth of a human being as a wonderful moment. I think many misogynists became more respectful of women, when they watched in what hardship they came into this world*<sup>32</sup>. Agnieszka Wrzesień and Katarzyna T. Nowak wrote in "Przekrój" that *For the team, "Pierwszy krzyk" was a lesson of respect and humbleness, respect for another person, their right to intimacy, to pain, but also to joy and happiness*<sup>33</sup>. The series was also praised by Anita Piotrowska: *Our Polish experiments with documentary soap genre are fortunately uplifting: while watching "Pierwszy krzyk" or "Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus" it is hard not to notice how the filmmakers try (perhaps even too much) to keep the boundaries, how they try to discourage away the voyeurism and engage in participatory positions. They particularly care about befriending the viewers with protagonists (...). Each birth is a pretext to show not only different familial situations, but also attitudes and reactions. The series does not sentimentalise the act of birth giving: it is actually quite literal, even brutal*<sup>34</sup>.

But Katarzyna Jabłońska had mixed feelings about the commentary at the beginning of each episode – "our film is a story about the miracle of birth" – and its inadequacy in being able to show reality. *They (...) manage to show many touching moments, but do they capture the miracle of birth? Can we even film the miracle? And even more so – can one speak about it in the chosen convention of a telenovela? (...) How to shoot intimacy without destroying it – camera and the team are*

*always intruders in the situations like this. Protagonist are not comfortable with the [filming team's] presence, even if they previously agreed to it. And the issue is not even that we can clearly see this on the screen, but that it disturbs the occurrence of the miracle (only on the screen?), and certainly destroys the intimacy*<sup>35</sup>.

The series was, of course, a hot topic of debate among obstetricians, with many being pro as well as many against it. Szumowski said: *we tore the curtain down, behind which this special moment was hidden: a moment when biology and metaphysics become one*<sup>36</sup>.

In 2000, eight documentary telenovelas were made, and production was kept at the same level over the next few years<sup>37</sup>. Aside from documentary telenovelas, other docusoap-like series were made. They differed, however, in that there was no singular narrative between episodes of the series, with each episode showing different stories and different protagonists. However, they shared similar life situations or professions, or lived in similar areas, thus these series are often mistaken for telenovelas (*Komornicy, Single, Granice, Trzeba żyć*). Since 2005 (when there was no new telenovelas aired), the production began to fade (2006: 3, 2007: 3, 2008: 1, 2009 and 2010: 0, 2011: 1). Most of the orders came from public television channels 1 and 2, and they were often aired during evening prime time slots. These series ranged from five episodes (*Oddam życie za pracę*) to just over 170 (*Kochaj mnie*). In terms of themes and topics, some filmmakers used a docusoap repertoire of health-hospitals, an approach that had been tried and tested in Germany and the UK (apart of *Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus* and *Pierwszy krzyk* from 1999, in 2000 were made: *Centrum nadziei, Klinika cudów, Pamiętnik rodzinny, Pierwszy krzyk*; in 2004 – *To nie jest koniec świata*; in 2008 – *Szpital odzyskanej nadziei* and in 2011 – *Operacja życie*). These were stylized on, for example, *The Doctor* (BBC1, 1990), *Children's Hospital* (BBC 1, 1996), *Great Ormond Street Hospital* (BBC1, 1996), *Liverpool Mums* (C5 Bazal, 1998) and *Geburtsstation* (Arte, SFB, 1999). There were also veterinary-themed telenovelas (*Lecznica pod św. Franciszkiem*, 2000; *Klinika małych stworzeń*, 2004), inspired by series much loved by Britons such as *Animal Hospital* (BBC 1, 1995) or *Vets in Practice* (BBC 1, 1997-2002). In 2001 *Nauka jazdy* was made, this was a Polish version of the popular in the UK series *Driving School* (BBC1, 1997)<sup>38</sup>, a series that became exported to many other countries (Germany, *Die Fahrschule*, SAT.1, or Norway, *Klar, ferdig, kjør*, TV Norge, 1999). Filmmakers were inspired by ongoing issues, as much as by actual events and social problems, and were interested in issues on universal and local scales. There were quite a few series focused on children and youth. *Kochaj mnie* (2001) was about children in orphanages; *Przedszkolandia* (2002) was about children from nursery no. 334 in Bielany, Warsaw; *Adopcje* (2003) about children for whom the most important moment in life was to find new parents, and the adults who decided to adopt a child; *S.O.S! Dzieciom* (2007) was about children in pathological situations. A series of films was devoted to the themes of emigration: *Zielona karta* (2002), *Chicago* (2002), *Bitwa o Anglię* (2004) and *Wyjechani* (2007). There are two documentary telenovelas made about the army: *Kawaleria powietrzna* (2000) is about Polish Air Forces, and *Babilon.pl* (2004) is about Polish troops in Iraq. Also the police and community service officers became topics of some series: *Prawdziwe psy* (2001) was about Warsaw Metropolitan Police, and *Aniolki* (2001) about community service officers, while *Akademia Policyjna* (2006) was about

a group of young women trying to get into the police academy. Jurisprudence is also a topic of *Gorzka miłość* (2006), which tells the story of women rearing children in the prison. Dealing with alcoholism is shown in *Ja, alkoholik* (2003). Being single and lonely are the themes of *Nieparzyści* (2000), which tells the story of people using matching bureaus, and *Kochankowie z internet* (2006) is about people looking for a partner on the internet. Girls dreaming about a “big world” and a media career are featured in *Modelki* (2000) and *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym* (2003). Countryside is a theme of *Złote lany* (2000), and the *Delegacja* (2003) is a telenovela set just before Poland joined the EU, about Polish peasants visiting countryside in other EU countries. Unemployment is the theme of *Serce z węgla* (2002) about miners being made redundant; *Oddam życie za pracę* (2002) about unemployed people in a small town in the north-west Poland; and finally the telenovela *Młode rekiny* (2004) focuses on young people who open their own businesses while still in school or higher education. On the other hand, there was *Zupełnie zwyczajne życie* (2007) about people looking for a job and raising children as single parents. The world that does not exist anymore was captured in *U nas w Pekinie* (2004) about the inhabitants of Warsaw’s building at Złota Street 83; and *Jarmark Europa* (2004) about the famous Warsaw market situated in the no longer existing football stadium. Probably the only documentary telenovela that shows the present day but also tells something about the past is the *Dusza kresowa* (2004) about people relocated from Kresy [parts of the contemporary Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine] to the west of Poland after WWII. One telenovela touched upon the theme of natural disasters: *Powodzianie* (2001) is about the victims of the floods in July 2001. Among the telenovelas with distinctly lighter themes we can note *Czirliderki* (2001), about K-12 group of girls from Pruszków cheerleading sports teams (a still rather unusual and young a phenomena in Poland); *Ach jak przyjemnie* (2002) about a group of young people on a sailing course; *Noc poślubna, ale kino* (2002) about amateur filmmakers trying to do a film about a wedding night. Between 1999-2004, that is during the period of greatest popularity of documentary telenovelas, the most popular were: *Pierwszy krzyk*, *Złote lany*, *Przedszkolandia*, *Prawdziwe psy*, *Kochaj mnie*.

Some telenovelas, as fiction series often do, popularize socially important issues. For example *Operacja życie*, initiated by the Polish Federation of Patients “Dialtransplant”, was there to encourage people to donate their organs. The series was made under the patronage of the Ministry of Health, and was filmed on the 45 anniversary of the first successful transplant operation.

The above-mentioned documentary telenovelas rehearse the same relative canon of the docusoap characteristics<sup>39</sup>. These are: 1) close links to documentary films; 2) use of soap opera structures; 3) focus on main protagonists’ 4) entertainment principle; 5) importance of place; 6) contrast. In the first case, the series gives a strong sense of “being there”, due to the concrete locations, spontaneous and not scripted dialogues, and authentic people. The use of a voice-over commentary is also interesting here, with the commentary often provided by well-known actors (Krystyna Janda, Franciszek Pieczka, Janusz Gajos, Marian Kociniak, Andrzej Zaorski) and lectors known from other documentary films (e.g. Jolanta Niewiadomska and Krystyna Czubówna).

In the second case, telenovelas are most often situated in one place, which becomes more and more familiar to viewers as the plot develops; docusoaps introduce

the protagonists in such a way so as to facilitate the viewers' identifications (as it is the case in the fiction soap operas). The story is usually "packed" into a 30 min episodes, using familiar tactics of ending on cliff-hangers (suspending tension and the curiosity), and suggesting new developments in episodes to come<sup>40</sup>. Most documentary telenovelas have introductions, as regular series have, familiarising spectators with the main themes and issues, sometimes reminding them of previous events, sometimes creating specific mood. Moreover, documentary telenovelas use episodic narration, with three or more plots woven in each episode, creating the impression of a lively and vibrant community. This facilitates the exchange of perspectives and places, and helps to control the flow of narrative events (especially useful in diversifying narration, hiding weak plots, controlling the pace). The films use strategies of creating tension known from full feature films – eavesdropping, intervening in relations between protagonists. Finally, music is also used to build the atmosphere and also as an element characterizing and differentiating one docsoap from another.

The third case is about choosing strong characters and personalities that naturally sense what is being expected from them, and will play it for the camera. They should be seeking attention, be interactive, and be easy in sharing emotions, and personal opinions; they are expected to deliver a form of performance.

The fourth element, entertainment principle, is perhaps not as strong in the case of documentary telenovelas, as it is in the case of docusoaps. This is due to telenovela's topics being more serious and socially conscious; still, most telenovelas do not aspire to offer any new insights into the functioning mechanisms of world order – they do provide entertainment, or satisfy the curiosity and voyeurism of viewers. Although focusing on experiences and feelings of people (e.g. at the work place), the films avoid topics such as gender discrimination, mobbing, or poor working conditions. Films do not aim at uncovering institutional and organizational shortcomings, but instead to show a series of relatively innocent stories rooted in everyday experiences of ordinary people. 'Problematic' issues seem to be incidental and do not form part of a wider argument or critique. Telenovelas focus on individual cases, which enliven the workplace, rather than highlight problems. Documentary filmmakers are first of all interested in the same issues that attract tabloid journalists.

The fifth element, the importance of place, is significant for it enables the selection of a group of telegenic personalities. A relatively confined location becomes a backdrop against which a group of people ("people like you and me") can be assembled and filmed while interacting with others; sometimes the interaction is also with the filmmakers, whose role, amongst others, is to be protagonist's trustee and confidant. Location is the starting point or decoration for a series of sequences focused on protagonists and, if relatively fixed, creates forms of identifications (which is similar to what happens when watching soap operas) for viewers.

The last element, that of contrasts, is the basic rule of constructing documentary telenovelas. If a conflict or hard to solve problem does not emerge from the story itself (that is what often happens), filmmakers will introduce tensions by generating small skirmishes. This is done, for example, by selecting clashing personalities who get in conflict when confronted with each other (similarly to the talk show programs). In this way filmmakers can plan an awkward situation to provoke anger, tears, arguments, and other emotions. When the stories are weak, quiet and argu-

mentative people are paired, aggressive and calm, windbag and clam, arrogant and nice, or assertive and timid, open and reserved.

Richard Kilborn argues<sup>41</sup> that docusoaps are light-hearted and at the “lighter” end of the documentary spectrum. From the beginning, the genre did not pretend to have any aspirations about understanding the world. Instead we see the opinions and experiences of nice or arrogant people, with all their funny anecdotes, or sometimes hardly believable real histories. The protagonists know that they will not become part of the critique of organizations and institutions to which they belong, or of the places where they live. This means the organizations that decided to partake in docusoaps had not been afraid of being exposed. Kilborn notes that, in the past, institutions were suspicious of documentary filmmakers. Now those seeking media attention actively look for the filmmakers, which proves the typical “indistinctiveness” of the genre, as it is perceived to be free advertising, rather than something to avoid.

These characteristics are also typical for the Polish documentary telenovela, perhaps with the exception of the light-hearted tone, which is only typical to some titles, with the rest being centred on drama, illness and misfortune. Because docusoaps are numerous and diverse, it is hard to find any particular differences between a docusoap and a documentary telenovela. If we relate mostly to the UK commentators of the genre, it seems that the major difference lies in the topics with Polish producers focusing on more serious ones. Brian Winston appreciates British docusoaps for not treating ordinary people as victims or as a “social problem”, thus breaking with the traditional seriousness of documentaries mostly by using the humour found in the stories that are told. Breton and Cohen<sup>42</sup> argue that the docusoaps discovered humour, making the films lighter, nicer and more interesting to watch. In Polish documentary telenovelas the opposite is the case. They are dominated by serious themes that seem to be an inventory of social problems and misfortunes whilst also celebrating banality.

Kilborn argues that there is more identification with docusoaps’ protagonists (as it is in the case of soap operas), which constitutes one of the basic characteristics of the genre. In the instance of the documentary telenovela, the identification occurs only among a specific group of viewers; others, who do not belong to this specific social group perform more of a comparison between themselves and protagonists (to the protagonist’s disadvantage). This relates to how protagonists are presented in some documentary telenovela: the use of humour is often perceived to be a patronising sneer rather than anything else. British people also started their adventure with docusoaps via the serious issues of human or animal health and well being, but then came a focus on life in the opera house, airport, driving school, holiday cruise, hotel, and so on. In Poland there are also more light-hearted productions, enough to mention *Ach, jak przyjemnie*, *Kresowa dusza*, *Akademia policyjna*, *Nauka jazdy*, *Czirliderki*, *Delegacja* and to some degree *Złote lany*, *Pierwszy krzyk* and *Klinika cudów*. Still, the prevailing themes are: unemployment, alcoholism, illnesses, loneliness, war, criminality, rough beginnings of adult life, bringing up children behind prison bars, and all the problems that can be seen through the prism of police inspectors, army recruits, emigrants, immigrants, or victims of natural disasters. Even those films that are meant to be easy and entertaining (e.g. *Modelki*, *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, *Noc posłubna, ale kino* or *Kochankowie*

z Internetu) all proved rather depressing and gloomy. This is due to the pessimistic (not to mention, easy) social diagnosis, the mix of the characters, and the often humiliating way in which they are portrayed.

Docusoap is more attached to the banal frivolity of everyday life, and does not hold educational and informative ambitions. Most often it shows the world well known to the spectators – It does not interpret, only portrays life with the camera lens (and comments on the scene with a voice-over). Breton and Cohen write that docusoap rejects teleological searching for meaning, and satisfies itself with gossip and banality. Dovey<sup>43</sup> goes further claiming that docusoaps are flat and shallow in comparison with documentaries, but also in their own soap-opera-like composition. Kilborn further insists that docusoaps concentrate on people and interactions between them, only accidentally helping us understand the backstage functioning of professions, and featured organizations; docusoaps very rarely engage analytically and critically with reality, as is the case with traditional investigative documentary films<sup>44</sup>. Documentary telenovela occasionally pretends to be a socially minded series, but it hardly ever goes beyond the banal and mundane. It only is informative when it shows socially excluded, marginalized and stigmatized people, but even then information is not full or correct, if mostly sensational. Overall the Polish documentary telenovelas are more closely related to British soap operas (which often engage with social issues, leaving the impression that social service is one of its main functions), then to the British docusoaps (which avoid serious content with the aim of increasing their attractiveness to spectators).

There were no heated debates among Polish documentary filmmakers and broadcasters about the dangers of documentary telenovela and the reality TV genres. The producers stressed the positive aspects, of course. Wojciech Szumowski claimed in 1999 that documentary telenovela is gaining popularity across the globe, because the (mis)fortunes of ordinary people are increasingly seen as more interesting than the fiction, and that the development of this genre is a way of gaining the balance in the world dominated by fiction. Andrzej Fidyk, on the other hand, said: *The genre proves that there is nothing better for the cinematic plot than a possibility of registering the flow of time. Long has the cinema searched for the way to capture the flow of time differently than via the use of retrospectives. In the case of the documentary telenovela, the camera lenses solve [the problem]. Simply put, everything is happening in the real time. That our protagonists have a concrete addresses, and that the spectators can even find the characters and talk with them about what happened – this gives the sense of participating in the events that are happening on the screen. The connection with the reality show could be obvious, but is incorrect, because the characters in those programmes are isolated from the reality in the controlled environment. Our protagonists remain in their own environment, and we just film their everyday life. To put it short: a piece of real life*<sup>45</sup>. However, some documentary filmmakers who did not venture into the new territory were rather critical of the genre. Marcel Łoziński in 2004 said: *In most of the documentary telenovelas the commentary describing what we are seeing, what we saw, or what we will see in a moment, is simply unbearable. This is an infantile and shallow way of seeing and telling stories*<sup>46</sup>. And years later, in 2011, when asked about the power of contemporary documentaries, he replied: *People are fed up with fairy-tales, telenovelas, all those fake documentaries and sensationalism. I have*

*a feeling that they search more often for their own reflection, their fears and problems, and all that is inside them* <sup>47</sup>.

Even though there are some prominent names among directors of documentary telenovelas, the series made by them had no chance of becoming landmark achievements, as this is their generic destination. The genre was invented for infotainment and not for the scrutiny of reality, a terrain of traditionally understood documentary filmmaking. Also, the primary criticisms of documentary telenovelas levelled by reviewers and academics, are what also sets them apart and gives them their canonical and distinctive characteristics. For example, the life events of real people are presented (sometimes provoked) in the fictional telenovela format, with a few snappy plots used to keep viewers' attention. The protagonists are one-dimensional, and clearly outlined problems provoke simple and sharp emotions, often honed in on by the narrator.

Nonetheless, some Polish commentators saw in the documentary telenovela an antidote to the overwhelming fictionalisation of life <sup>48</sup>. Others were pondering the development possibilities of the new genre. Marcin Niemojewski wrote: *Perhaps peeing at the reality in the actual time, following the human life in all its aspects, is the chance and the opportunity for this medium to find its own formula, just like the ambitious novel, or the charming radio programme* <sup>49</sup>. Others offered a "manual" of how to use documentary telenovelas: *Back in the past, we smuggled moral anxieties in socialist realism formulas, and journalistic analysis in the form of the stand up comedy. Today the important social observations are dressed up in the telenovela's costume. And as always... one simply needs to read between the lines* <sup>50</sup>. However, most voices remained critical. In 1999 Mirosław Pęczak wrote: *Invented in Britain, the documentary soap (documentary telenovela) is not for connoisseurs. It aims at less sophisticated consumers of the television's provision. In Poland, these could be fans of "Esmeralda"* <sup>51</sup>.

Jerzy Uszyński (2001) criticised the genre's escapism, simulated reality, oversimplification, and repetitiveness of situations. He noted that the primary objective of the documentaries (to discover the truth) is lost, and the telenovelas became affirmative counselling tools, confirming our (spectators) idea of the world <sup>52</sup>. A few years later (in 2003) Wiesław Godzic said: *In documentary telenovelas I am irritated by the constant play on the lowest instincts. Filmmakers find it difficult to move from the voyeurism to reflection about the society* <sup>53</sup>. His detachment came from the colliding raw material of reality with the wish to interpret it: *In the genre, the authors clearly suggest that the presence of the "real elements" is enough to claim the truthfulness for the whole film* <sup>54</sup>. In 2005 Małgorzata Hendrykowska wrote in a similar tone, accusing the telenovela of not trusting the "real" people, constantly stimulating and suggesting them in terms of how to play their own roles. Protagonists are objectified, and reduced to "curiosities" as heroes of the animal world – vulture or boa snake. *In the documentary telenovela, so-called real life in all its richness becomes a spectacle, especially where we deal with pain and (psychic) suffering. How many of those telenovelas aired in the recent years overcame the boundaries of "showing" the world, to benefit the deeper interpretation of the surrounding and rather complex reality?* <sup>55</sup> Mirosław Przyłipiak condemned all Polish documentary telenovelas for being arbitral: *As my criterion of judgment I take the thing most important in documentary filmmaking, that is the respect for*

*the observed reality. It is manifested in openness and an ability to listen to it. The respect's antitype lies in an arbitral and instrumental approach to the reality, when one uses it only to "prove" previously assumed truth* <sup>56</sup>.

However, he was more positive about the clear pedagogical tendency in documentary telenovelas: *They usually touch upon important topics, contain significant messages* <sup>57</sup>. Godzic noticed the worrying mechanisms in telenovela. He argues that it forces tears not to make the viewer rethink the organisation of the social order, but *To suggest that there exists the higher instance that is able to solve everything in a logical, clear and effective manner; while the spectators remain passively consuming words and images. Why not to give oneself to its [higher instance] enslavement? This is the logical consequence of how documentary telenovelas are narrated* <sup>58</sup>. Małgorzata Hendrykowska called the documentary telenovela the notebook organised in a way as to prove the a priori assumed thesis. *There is no space for silence, discretion, mystery, suggestion – each feeling needs to be exposed, each thought needs to be commented upon. (...) Telenovela's conclusion is its starting point, and the rest is the mere illustration of the imagined and pre-conceived model of the reality. In other words, documentary telenovela offers ready-made conclusions, shallow schemas in which protagonists, events, and observations are allocated according to the pre-existing key. To use the popular term "interactive", one could say that it is the classic documentary film that is interactive, if we compare it with the telenovela's pulp. The shape of the telenovela is an effect of the rushed shooting, and in consequence, of the shallow production, poor editing, and selfishness of protagonists who sense that they can help their own case by filming* <sup>59</sup>.

The weakness of the documentary telenovela stems from its genetic characteristics and, as such, can be excused to some degree. Documentary material, which mixes aesthetics with informational aspects, while made to entertain and please, does not provide too much reflection about society, nor does it perform deeper analysis of the filmed reality. Instead, it is a platform for ready-made interpretations that confirm the worldview served by the popular media and infotainment. But the critique concerns not only these issues; there was a strong reaction concerning the ethical side of documentary telenovelas. As in the case of many other "reality TV" programmes, the most controversial are the filmmakers' tactics to solicit protagonists' reactions, and the voyeuristic role of the spectator. *Why would one want to peep at the life of one's own neighbours is unclear, at least morally. Nonetheless the fact is that spectators are more and more inclined to watch and identify with the protagonists of the documentary series. Real people – their troubles, life challenges, true tears and true laughter – that is what is fascinating in "Pierwszy krzyk", "Szpital Dzieciątka Jezus", "Kawaleria powietrzna" – wrote one of the reviewers in 2000* <sup>60</sup>.

Director's interventions and the staging used in documentary telenovelas should not really surprise anyone, as they are known to be used also in documentaries, although not to such an extent. Wojciech Szumowski said: *I do use some cinematic tricks that pretend to transmission – that is the convention. The spectators need not to realise that, they ought not to realise that. That's my role, to choose certain aesthetics. But where I put the camera, where I point it, how I film – that is fist of all a matter of morality, and not only aesthetics* <sup>61</sup>. As the classic example of manipulation, Stanisław Krzemiński recalls the situation when, upon the sign, parents

are told to call their ill child in the hospital, because we know that this will provoke the child's reaction. *Editing, on the other hand, is about "squeezing" rather simple but gripping story from the shootings, and about adding to it the soap-opera like characteristics, by e.g. cutting protagonists' expressions short to get the maximum content from the simple form. People have, that is, the tendency to narrate long stories where only they know all the meanders, associations, and contexts, and so the viewers could find it incomprehensible* <sup>62</sup>.

It is hard to tell what reaction could we get if people were informed that the village showed in *Złote lany* has a completely different name, that the couples from *Nieparzyści* were fake, and that Joanna Naturalny from *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, who in the last episode of the series, in front of the eyes of millions declared that she is to divorce her husband, still lives with him and now says it was only for the purpose of the film. Questions and doubts related to the staging and provocation emerged among reviewers and commentators. Agnieszka Zwiefka wrote about *Nieparzyści*: *We do not entirely trust camera's eye, which already at the very beginning catches the protagonists' looks at each other, although their relationship is still to happen. How do the filmmakers know that these people will form a relationship later?* <sup>63</sup> Others discarded the artificiality of many scenes and dialogues, peeping at the staged intimate life. Still, perhaps it is not about manipulations, but about the quality of the effect. It is so, because the crossing of the ethical boundaries in documentary telenovelas has always proved aesthetically poor. This also concerns highlighted disastrous and unethical, to my mind, manipulation of spectatorship (but backlashing mostly the protagonists) to pretend there is social concern and interest in grave social problems. Poor social simulations in some documentary telenovelas, through the choice of the topic and declarations (*Nieparzyści*, *Serce z węgla*, *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym*, *U nas na Pekinie*), can be observed in the inadequate techniques used for filming. This incompatibility of the subject, form and style is not only a constraint of the genre, but also a consequence of the director's lack of control over the priorities. The alternatives are: to choose the educational-informative ambition, which drives us towards serious and challenging topics and issues, or to give in to the entertaining imperative that prefers techniques that weaken seriousness. There is a certain margin of choice here, as there is in the choice of protagonists and their portrayal. Some filmmakers could not decide if they wanted to show how young and naive girls from the province are exploited and abused by some doggy types, or if they wanted to "entertain" viewers by showing how stupid and primitive they are, who see a better life possibility in selling the beauty of their daughters (while in the background topless girls are fighting in custard).

Additionally, in the context of the documentary telenovela, an often-raised issue was the exploitation of protagonists. Some filmmakers felt relieved from the duty of taking care of their protagonists, because of the agreement and general keen attitudes of the participants. Others, understanding the dangers of the genre, tried to form their own rules that would prevent them from the aesthetics and ethical issues of *Big Brother*. The least dubious series were those where one could feel the filmmakers' respect to the topic, but mostly to the protagonists. This is manifested mainly by the ability to know when to turn the camera off, and what not to include when editing. I think the best and most interesting documentary telenovelas are ex-

actly those, where such respect is clearly manifested, where the filmmakers do not ridicule or put down their protagonists. That there is a margin of freedom in the “soapy” documentary is best proven by the successful documentary telenovelas like *Dusza kresowa* (2004) and *Ja, alkoholik* (2003). In *Dusza kresowa*, Ewa Straburzyńska (who also made one of the worst telenovelas *Nieparzyści*, 2000) took the challenge of finding the answer to the question of what happens to the person cut off from their roots, and displaced. She made the series about the true kresowiaci [people who after the WWII were relocated from the east, contemporary Belarus and Ukraine, to the other parts of Poland] and their families and family background. She showed that the family that was relocated and displaced does not stop identifying with the old regions, and does not stop longing for them. In this case, the author did not choose media-oriented people as protagonists, and did not look down on them; she may not have shown everything that she witnessed during filming. Similarly Jacek Bławut in *Ja, alkoholik*, who showed alcohol-addicted people who did not give up trying to return to normal life. He also treated them respectfully. *I will never show everything. One must know the boundaries and stick to them all the time*, he said <sup>64</sup>. For example, he shot a carousal but did not show it in the film. *One cannot go below certain artistic level* <sup>65</sup>.

The documentary telenovelas managed somehow to capture the image of the Polish reality at the brink of the new century, however distorted, tendentious and non-representative. Jerzy Uszyński argues that telenovelas created a sociographic map of Poland <sup>66</sup>; there are people from metropolitan cities and small villages, from different regions, of both genders, and of all ages. There are representatives of many professions too, but in many cases the choice of protagonists is dictated by the mechanics of the genre. The most often chosen social and professional groups were those who not only satisfied the curiosity of viewers, but also could easily deliver: 1) emotions (people in hospitals, shelters, animals in vet hospitals, unemployed or victims of the natural disasters); 2) strong scenes as in the fiction films, with the element of sensation (army, police, prison, reformatory); 3) other strong emotions (modelling, sex work). Accountants or teachers did not have many chances to become protagonists of documentary telenovelas. However, from the groups that did not straightforwardly guarantee numerous elements described above (clients of the dating services, people looking for love over the internet, inhabitants of the soon to be demolished block of flats), only those people who were strongly oriented towards the media were chosen. These people would be open and chatty, or would be some sort of “attraction” on their own (e.g. quarrelsome, or life ambitions and aspirations beyond their actual possibilities, or people with a specific “deficit”). The picture of Polish society that we gain (with its intellectual level, morale, mentality, and customs) is rather scary, and is a consequence of the one-sidedness in representation. This depiction is partially real, as it lacks the counter-balance, complexity and multiplicity, with which we deal in our everyday lives. Certain social groups (communities as well as specific personalities) are clearly not within a range of filmmakers’ interests (apart of the hospital telenovela, which of course, is of interests to everybody).

In the history of the Polish documentary telenovela, certain series stand out. Jacek Bławut and Wojciech Maciejewski’s *Kawaleria powietrzna* (2000) is about a group of recruits who on the 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1999, formed the 25 Air Force Brigades.

The film became very popular due to the unintended attention received from the people shocked by the life conditions of the soldiers. Even though the officers who agreed on filming knew and saliently accepted certain forms of abuse, after the airing of the first three episodes the case became of interest to the prosecution. According to "Gazeta Wyborcza"<sup>67</sup>, it was noted that officers abuse and humiliate recruits. *We have received many telephones from the army representatives, all resentful of the film. We have to watch all episodes now, to see to what extent the plot is real or fictionally staged*, said one of the army prosecutors<sup>68</sup>. It was the first case in Poland, when the prosecutor tried to establish the percentage of the staging in the documentary telenovela. Also the army Bishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź protested against the film in the open letter to the parliamentary commission for the national defence. Additionally the director of the socio-educational department of the Ministry of the National Defence was critical about the series: *I watched three episodes and I am disgusted. Such imaginary does not help the Polish Army. Is it real? Nonsense. Three junior sergeants swear, creating the image of the whole army. I think it is staged. Somebody is trying hard to transpose the American traditions into Polish soil*<sup>69</sup>. Filmmakers consequently refuted accusations about manipulation and staging, and were accusing the military hierarchs for not being in touch with the everyday army reality. The good thing, according to the documentary filmmaker Bolesław Sulik, was that the film provoked discussion, as the worst-case scenario would be to stop showing it<sup>70</sup>.

On the other hand, the series *Kochaj mnie* (TVP 2, 2002) by Athena Sawidis and Grzegorz Siedlecki, gained its own life beyond the TV screen. The film was about children from an orphanage, and quickly became some sort of intervention programme. It provoked many emotions (which is the aim of the documentary telenovela), but also concrete decisions about the help that was offered to children, including adoption of some of them. There were many telephones after each episode, and there was even a special number shown during the emission, where more information about the adoption of the shown children was available. Also the "Przyjaciółka" Foundation was involved in helping the children. There was also a webpage, updated once a week, with episode descriptions, telephone numbers, and other information about adoption. The cinematographic criteria gave place to the utilitarian character of the series.

Most media attention, however, received the 22 episodes of Irena and Jerzy Morawski's documentary telenovela *Ballada o lekkim zabarwieniu erotycznym* (2003, TVP 1). It told the story of young girls recruited as the attractions of the provincial discos, where they presented lingerie, or fought in oil, custard, foam, or pasta noodles, while being regularly humiliated verbally. The series not only provoked discussion, or sensational coverage in tabloid newspapers, but also the relevant controlling body fined Polish Television for propagating negative ideas and showing situations that put the protagonists in physical and mental danger. TVP was accused of promoting exploitation, demoralising the youth, and showing procurement as the normal behaviour.

It is worth mentioning one more telenovela, due to its context of origin. What was a natural and spontaneous reaction to *Kochaj mnie*, in the case of the *Zupełnie zwyczajne życie* (TVP 3 Lublin, 2007) was pre-planned. The series was part of the of the big research project "@lterEgo", financed the EU EQUAL framework. It

aimed at diminishing the obstacles faced by single parents in becoming active on the job market. The telenovela's aim was to register the life of the chosen group of the programme's beneficiaries – their life on the job market. The documentary telenovela was a so-called good practice, developed during the project. Interestingly, the project members wrote: *There are two things, in relation to the impact on the production process, differentiating documentary telenovela from other productions. The social factor of the phenomena is very important, and the impact that such media form has. Due to the method of filmmaking as well as due to its impact, we need to account for the institutionalisation of the telenovela. It becomes a real part of the protagonist life, mediates between the protagonist and the viewer, organises their lives, also beyond the moments of filming. It is due too the specific work co-ordination. The choice of protagonists is the most important part of the production process. In the case of "Zupełnie zwyczajne życie" the process of recruiting characters was subdued to the recruitment of the beneficiaries of the whole project. The researchers used own database: knew the participants' motivation, ability to change, communication skills, and intellectual abilities of the potential protagonists* <sup>71</sup>. From the very beginning, the research plan was to recruit participants that would be attractive for the project and for the camera. Documentary telenovela belongs to the continuum of reality and fiction, and each incarnation, depending on the factors mentioned earlier, is situated closer or further away from the core of the infotainment.

While discussing docusoaps and documentary telenovelas, it is worth mentioning the other hybrid forms are emerging at the borders. I am thinking of the celebrity docusoap, which has two versions. In the first case, the spectators can peep at the family life of the celebrity person in their house (for example *The Osbournes* /MTV, 2001/ featuring rock star Ozzy Osbourne). The second version of the celebrity docusoap is about mixing the docusoap with elements of celebrity. For example, rather than watching ordinary people trying to get a driving licence like in *Driving School*, we watch the celebrity personalities doing it, as in the case of the *Celebrity Driving School* (BBC 1, 2003). An interesting hybrid docusoap is also one about animals. The narration reminds us a little of the old school Disney documentary features about animals; with the exception that now it is told in the episodic manner, exposing its serialized character. The example is the British *Meerkat Manor* <sup>72</sup>. In the UK and Germany, there is even a form called a pseudo docusoap, which in Poland is called para-documentary series (but also documentary telenovela, even if not having much in common with the telenovela). It is the scenario-based production, played by the first-time-behind-the-camera non-professional actors. Polsat series are good examples: *Trudne sprawy* (2011), *Dlaczego ja?* (2010) and *Pamiętniki z wakacji* (2011), as well as the German series: *Verdachtsfälle* (RTL, 2009), *X-Diarries – love, sun & fun* (RTL 2, 2010), *Familien im Brennpunkt* (RTL, 2011), *Family Stories* (RTL 2, 2011) and *Berlin – Tag & Nacht* (RTL 2, 2011).

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- <sup>1</sup> Author's interview with Stanisław Krzemiński, 14.11.2006.
- <sup>2</sup> M. Piwowar, *Coraz mniej zahamowań*, "Rzeczpospolita" 26.03.2006, no. 72, p. 11A.
- <sup>3</sup> [http://www.besta.pl/produkcja/szpital\\_dzieciatka\\_jezus/szpital\\_dzieciatka\\_jezus\\_pl.html](http://www.besta.pl/produkcja/szpital_dzieciatka_jezus/szpital_dzieciatka_jezus_pl.html) (Accessed: 10.01.2012).
- <sup>4</sup> J. Kobus, *Big Górnik*, "Wprost" 28.01.2001, p. 110.
- <sup>5</sup> M. Piwowar, op. cit.
- <sup>6</sup> After: R. Kilborn, *Staging the Real. Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother*, Manchester University Press, Manchester-New York, 2003, p. 93.
- <sup>7</sup> M. McFadyean, *Family Entertainment*, "Guardian" (Part 2) 19.04.1993, p. 13.
- <sup>8</sup> The expression was used for the first time at the UCLA seminar "Border Genres: Facts, Fictions, and Spaces Between", 1999.
- <sup>9</sup> M. Lünenborg, *Journalism as Popular Culture. Docu-Soap: A new Genre Crossing the Border of Fact and Fiction*. Conference presentation, IAMCR, Barcelona, 2002, p. 11. [http://www.portalcomunicacion.com/bcn2002-2/n\\_eng/programme/prog\\_ind/papers/l/pdf/1006\\_lunen.pdf](http://www.portalcomunicacion.com/bcn2002-2/n_eng/programme/prog_ind/papers/l/pdf/1006_lunen.pdf) (Accessed: 10.01.2012).
- <sup>10</sup> L. Hachmeister, *Im Supermarkt der Wirklichkeit. Zur Ökonomie des Dokumentarfernsehens*, "Funkkorrespondenz" 1998, no. 45, pp. 1-5.
- <sup>11</sup> M. Lünenborg, op. cit.
- <sup>12</sup> J. K. Ruoff, *A Bastard Union of Several Forms. Style and Narrative in "An American Family"*, in: *Documenting the Documentary*, eds. K. Berry, G. Sloniowski, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1998, pp. 288-289.
- <sup>13</sup> See D. Paget, *Seven Theses about Border Genres / Five Modest Proposals about Docudrama*. Conference presentation, "Visible Evidence" (Utrecht–Amsterdam, 2000; and Brisbane, 2001) <http://www.lat-robe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0902/paget/dpfr14b.htm> (Accessed: 10.01.2012).
- <sup>14</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>15</sup> A. Bethell, *A Job, Some Stars, and a Big Row*, Media Watch 99, supplement to "Sight and Sound", London 1999, p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup> D. Hobson, *Soap Opera*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2003, p. 208.
- <sup>17</sup> In: R. Kilborn, op. cit., pp. 96-97
- <sup>18</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>20</sup> E. Klaus, S. Lücke, *Reality Tv – Definition und Merkmale einer erfolgreichen Genrefamilie am Beispiel von Relity Soap and Doku Soap*, "Medien&Kommunikation", Jahrgang 2/2003, no. 51, pp. 195-212.
- <sup>21</sup> Private interview, 14.11.2006.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>25</sup> Quoted after: T. Pikulski, *Prywatna historia telewizji publicznej*, Muza S.A., Warszawa 2002, p. 423.
- <sup>26</sup> A. Piotrowska, *Jak sfilmować czyjeś łzy*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 19-26.12.1999, no. 51-52.
- <sup>27</sup> M. Pęczak, *Kamera w brzuchu*, "Polityka" 01.05.1999, no. 18.
- <sup>28</sup> K. Jabłońska, *Na żywo*, "Więź", November 1999.
- <sup>29</sup> See: W. Godzic, *Telewizja i jej gatunki po "Wielkim Bracie"*, Universitas, Kraków 2004, p. 207.
- <sup>30</sup> Gaining an access to the maternity hospital (previously not even accessible by fathers), is an outcome of the transformations occurring in Poland during the 1990s. Especially the campaign "Human Birth Giving" ("Rodzić po ludzku"), by many hailed as one of the most successful campaigns of the decade, had much to do with changes in the conditions of birth giving in maternity hospitals.
- <sup>31</sup> A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, *Człowiek się rodzi*, "Przekrój" 1999, no. 51-51.
- <sup>32</sup> T. Pikulski, op. cit. p.424.
- <sup>33</sup> A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, op. cit.
- <sup>34</sup> A. Piotrowska, op. cit.
- <sup>35</sup> K. Jabłońska, op. cit.
- <sup>36</sup> A. Wrzesień, K. T. Nowak, op. cit.
- <sup>37</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the UK during the peak period of docusoap's popularity, as much as 75 series were produced only in 1998.
- <sup>38</sup> The *Driving School* episode aired on the July 15, 1997, reached the whopping 12,45 million of spectators (i.e. 53% of all spectatorship).
- <sup>39</sup> Here I partially relate to characteristics presented by Richard Kilborn, op. cit.
- <sup>40</sup> In the soap opera, it is a trailer.
- <sup>41</sup> R. Kilborn, op. cit.
- <sup>42</sup> S. Brenton, R. Cohen, *Shooting People. Adventures in Reality TV*, Verso, London 2003, p. 34.
- <sup>43</sup> J. Dovey, *Freakshow: First Person Media and Factual Television*, Pluto Press, London – Sterling, 2000.
- <sup>44</sup> J. Izod, R. Kilborn, M. Hibberd, *From Grierson to the Docu-Soap. Breaking the Boundaries*, University of Luton Press 2000, p. 112.
- <sup>45</sup> Quoted after: J. Cobus, op. cit.
- <sup>46</sup> A. Uszyńska, *Być dokumentalistą. Rozmowa z M. Łozińskim i J. Bławutem*, "Zeszyty Telewizyjne" 2004, no. 3, p. 94.
- <sup>47</sup> Source: Tomasz Baranski/PAP Life.
- <sup>48</sup> See: A. Zwiefka, *Transmisja z cudzego życia*, "Wprost" 23.04.2000, no. 17, pp. 112-114.

- <sup>49</sup> M. Niemojewski, *Serce z węgla*, "Wizja Publiczna" 2001, no. 11.
- <sup>50</sup> P. Legutko, *Dokument mydłem pachnący*, "Nowe Państwo" 2003, no. 11.
- <sup>51</sup> M. Pęczak, op. cit.
- <sup>52</sup> See: J. Uszyński, *Potrzebny kawał życia i proza realistyczna sprzed półtora wieku*, "Wizja Publiczna" 2001, no. 4.
- <sup>53</sup> After: J. Romanowicz, *Sensacja na uwięzi*, "Newsweek" 05.10.2003, no. 40.
- <sup>54</sup> W. Godzic, op. cit., p. 208.
- <sup>55</sup> M. Hendrykowska, *Telenowela dokumentalna, in: Klucze do rzeczywistości. Szkice i rozmowy o polskim filmie dokumentalnym po roku 1989*, ed. M. Hendrykowska, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2005, p. 103.
- <sup>56</sup> M. Przyłipiak, *Poetyka kina dokumentalnego*, Gdańsk – Słupsk 2004, p. 319.
- <sup>57</sup> M. Przyłipiak, *Najnowsze tendencje dokumentalizmu TV*, "Zeszyty telewizyjne" 2003, no. 1, p. 35.
- <sup>58</sup> W. Godzic, op. cit., p. 213.
- <sup>59</sup> M. Hendrykowska, op. cit., pp. 98-99.
- <sup>60</sup> I. Smoczyńska, *Marzyciele i podglądacze*, "Kino" 2000, no. 7/8, p. 31.
- <sup>61</sup> A. Zwiefka, op. cit., p. 212.
- <sup>62</sup> Author's interview with Stanisław Krzemiński 14.11.2006.
- <sup>63</sup> A. Zwiefka, op. cit., pp.112-114.
- <sup>64</sup> Quoted after: J. Romanowicz, op. cit.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>66</sup> J. Uszyński, *Telewizyjny pejzaż genologiczny*, Warszawa 2004, p. 94.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>70</sup> J. Grabarski, *Kawaleria przeklinająca*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 08.02.2000, no. 32.
- <sup>71</sup> *Recepta na zmianę. Katalog dobrych praktyk*. Publikacja Krajowych Sieci Tematycznych Inicjatywy Wspólnotowej EQUAL (temat G), Warszawa 2008, p. 141.
- <sup>72</sup> Produced by Southern Star Entertainment, UK, 2005; Animal Planet producer – Mark Wild, series producer – Lucinda Axelsson, series editor – Caroline Hawkins.

## SIGNS OF TIME – IN SEARCH OF FORM



*Ode to Joy*, dir. Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas (2005)

Photo: Gutek Film

# An Upside-Down World

*The Adventure of a Good Citizen* by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson as a portmanteau film

ANNA TASZYCKA

The film by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson *Przygoda człowieka poczciwego* (*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*) was created in 1937 as the fifth film made by the couple; it is at the same time the oldest of their films to have survived the WWII <sup>1</sup>.

Stefan Themerson in a letter to Clyde Jeavons from the Film Archive in London of 28 January 1975 points, that one, a bit unusual characteristic of the film is the fact that it can be played from the end to the beginning (once the sound synchronisation is maintained) <sup>2</sup>. In the book: *Themersonowie. Szkice biograficzne* (*Themersons. Biographical sketches*) Adriana Prodeus writes: *We do not know, however, whether anybody really tried to do it* <sup>3</sup>. It seems that despite the increasing interest in the Themersons' heritage in recent years nobody has analysed *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* from this perspective <sup>4</sup>. It appears that the backwards projection in this case is truly possible. What is more, it reveals new ways of perception and interpretation of the film.

The lost work of the Themersons entitled *Apteka* (*The pharmacy*, 1930) is considered to be the first Polish avant-garde film; however it is precisely the seven years older *Adventure...* read backwards that allows us to appreciate the intellectual flair and far-reaching look of the Themersons. Marcin Giżycki, emphasising the originality of the film wrote: *When talking about the wealth of means used – it was undoubtedly the most advanced film among all the works by the artists* <sup>5</sup>. *In addition to the original photos processed in various ways (accelerations, backwards movement, images in negative, etc.), unconventional shots (e.g. from a camera placed on its side) there were also lyrical fragments composed from abstract light reflexes or even, what becomes apparent only when analysing single frames, also abstract effects painted directly on the tape. Usually these are only “interjections” without a direct connection to the plot. Hence, taking into the account both the realisation technique and the structure of the whole, we have to consider “The Adventure...” to be a complex film collage, however, not without a linear narrative* <sup>6</sup>. The Themersons' precision – upon the discovery of additional ways to perceive the film – proves to be the watchmaker's and this way the almost 10-minute projection of the film unexpectedly doubles its length. Maybe the most unusual thing about this film experiment, also highlighted by Giżycki, is the linearity of *The Adventure...* Despite all the formal wealth of this poetic work, its plot reveals in the traditional cause and effect way and the film has a classical beginning, development and ending. Let us recall the film's plot in short.

The protagonist of the picture is a clerk, the good citizen of the title, who overhears the following sentence on the phone: *Even if you walk backwards there won't*

*be a hole in the sky!* These are the words spoken by a carpenter to a couple of workers who are taking a wardrobe with a mirror out of his workshop in a rather awkward way; one of them is walking backwards. The clerk treats the words literally. They become an impulse to change his former, ordered and conformist, existence. He puts down the receiver and carefully walks out of the office walking backwards. By accident he bumps into the workers carrying the wardrobe; in the confusion he takes the place of one of them. From now on, carrying the wardrobe with the other worker, they walk – the protagonist still backwards – towards the forest. Such behaviour arouses protests – a crowd appears with slogans *Down with walking backwards! We all walk forwards! For sure there will be a hole in the sky!* For the clerk the forest becomes a land in which the reality reveals its poetic possibilities: in a way the wardrobe becomes their catalyst. He is followed to the forest by the group of protesters but they find only a wardrobe with a mirror, but without the back. At the end of the film the protagonist appears again sitting on a chimney with a flute in his hand. Looking into the camera he says to the spectators: *You must understand the metaphor Ladies and Gentlemen!* Then we see a child taking his first steps. After this the clerk sitting on the chimney appears once more and this is the end of the film.

Projection of the film backwards proves to be not only an “accidental” possibility of the film but a well thought out, coherent concept. What story develops this time? The film starts with the clerk sitting on a chimney, right after there is a shot of a child walking backwards across the middle of the frame. In the next frame we see the man again jumping down from the roof to appear in the next frame in a forest where he is observed by the gathered crowd. After leaving the forest, carrying the wardrobe, the clerk walks across the city so at the end of his journey he can sit at his desk in the office and... call the carpenter. In the last frame we see hands holding drumsticks hitting the bowler hat like a drum. The film can be also seen backwards in a mirror image (sic!), however this does not change its message in a significant way.

The wardrobe in the backwards projection maintains its poetic possibilities. This time the participants of the demonstration walk back through it so they can continue marching backwards. It seems that such a function of the wardrobe with mirror allows us to treat it as a metaphor for art which changed our perception of reality, knocking us out of our previous habits<sup>7</sup>. We should not forget that during the backwards projection, the wardrobe (i.e. art) also becomes a vehicle for returning to “normality”; the clerk comes back to his place in the line. However it happens only for a moment; in an appropriate moment – during the projection of the film from the beginning – the art (wardrobe) will enable him to come back to the poetic dimension of reality.

What is interesting, since during the first projection (let us call it traditional or classic) after bumping into the wardrobe the protagonist walks mainly backwards, in the case of the backwards projection he moves normally, forward. He is contrasted by the rebelling crowd walking backwards while still carrying the boards with the slogans *No to walking backwards!, We all walk forward* which this time sound ironic, even provocative<sup>8</sup>. Also one of the workers carrying the wardrobe walks backwards (one of them is carrying the wardrobe walking backwards, the other walking forward). The last frame of the film, presenting the drumsticks hitting a head in a bowler hat like a drum, can be in this case treated as a dream of the clerk falling asleep at his desk, and mixes the reality with a dream.



*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, dir. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1937)



*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, dir. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1937)

It is impossible not to notice the self-reference character of the film by the Themersons which proves its surfictional nature<sup>9</sup>. I have taken the notion of surfiction from Raymond Federman, it means – in short – an action within art (Federman refers to literature) which reveals the fictional nature of the created reality. Federman goes further in his deliberations and as surfictional considers actions of human beings which make us aware of the fictitious nature of life.

The question remains – how could we interpret the beginning of the film with the characters and content appearing before the good citizen gets up from his desk and starts his unusual adventure? Already in the first frame we see a man in a bowler hat who looks carefully to his right and left. Then we see boards with arrows and inscriptions: “right” and “left”. A moment later the frame is divided in two (admittedly it is not ideally symmetrical, similarly to the scene with the drumsticks right at the beginning of the film) with a wardrobe with mirror from which come out – at the same time in negative and positive – characters of the film. In the next frame again we see the arrows and a moment later the head of the good citizen presented in the familiar configuration – once from the right, once from the left side (looking once one way, once the other). This situation is concluded by a symmetrical presentation of his head, this time seen from the back.

Already the beginning of the film suggests the omnipresent symmetry which – as it appears – refers not only to the conventional plot of the film, but also to the doubling that results from the possibility of its “second” reading. Moreover, the film seems to have no end since the end of every subsequent projection becomes the beginning of another, and hence the projection of the film itself can last an eternity; this is a “vicious circle” with no exit. Thus created symmetry becomes in a special way an ideal symmetry<sup>10</sup>.

If we look for a wider context in which we could place the work by the Themersons it appears that precisely the circularity of its structure can be a clue: the beginning of the film which is its end and the end that at the same time becomes the new beginning. Such a structure requires the spectator to go beyond his/her previous reception habits. The Themersons seem to be ahead of their time because they foreshadow by a several decades the experiments of structural and extended cinema.

Gene Youngblood, the author of *Expanded Cinema* (1970), describes the films that in the first place require the spectators to change their awareness: *When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness. (...) Expanded cinema is not a movie at all: like life it is a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes*<sup>11</sup>. Maybe even more precise here would be the term Youngblood used in his book: *synaesthetic cinema*. As Youngblood wrote, *synaesthesia is the harmony of different or opposing impulses produced by a work of art*<sup>12</sup>. As Giżycki suggests synaesthetic art is overwhelming and fully aware of the means it uses.

The similarity between the film by the Themersons and the structural cinema lies in the emphasis given – through its special form – to the meta-discursive character of the film work<sup>13</sup>. It is worth remembering that structural film is one of these phenomena that in fact do not have a unanimous definition. According to P. Adams Sitney, who introduced this notion in 1969, the structural film has four main features. These are: static, fixed position of the camera (static frame immo-

bilises the spectator's point of view) (1), trembling, blinking, stroboscopic effect (2), multiple repetition of the same frame (or the same series of frames) copied on tape – the film loop effect (3), repeated filming of images presented on film or TV screen, that is refilming (4) <sup>14</sup>.

Kluszczyński adds that according to Sitney structural film may have only one of the above-mentioned features or not have any at all and still be a part of the said trend. Why is it so? Kluszczyński argues that the structural character of the film (understood as metadiscursive) is not created by these features but is expressed through them and this means that it may also reveal itself through a different configuration of features. Kluszczyński refers also to Peter Gidal: *In a structural/materialist film intrafilm relations (not intraframe), material relations: spectator-film and relations of the film structure are primary in relation to any narrative content. The basic aim of a structural/materialistic film is (...) to explain and analyse the process of production of a given image in every specific moment* <sup>15</sup>.

Watching the film by the Themersons today it is impossible not to notice that in a way it encourages the spectator to interact, making him/her abandon his/her receptive habits connected with traditional methods of film projection. The collage nature of the work (combination of animation, feature film and a well thought out and composed film form) do not exhaust, as it appears, its innovative character which in the first place is a continuation of the experiments of the film avant-garde from the 1920s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and secondly it is a precursor of future experimental cinema.

In the case of the film by Themersons and the incredible possibilities of perception it creates, it seems impossible to separate the form from the content without analysing in all the possible contexts their mutual impact. Themersons' gesture leads us also towards literary studies, especially "liberature", which makes us read the content and message of the work also through the specific form of the book. *Liberature is a type of literature in which the text and the material form of the book create an organic whole, and all elements, also the non-verbal, may be the carriers of meaning. Thus in a liberary work it is not only the verbal layer that is meaningful but also the physical space and construction of a book, its shape, format, typographical setting. The size, font and the colour of letters as well as the empty space of the page, drawing or a photo integrated with the text, finally type of paper or another material might all be significant. Not without meaning are all the numerical values: the size of the volume or number of pages, words or even particular characters. The reader deals with a total work which may assume any form (in accordance with the second meaning of the Latin "liber") what in practice means sometimes radical abandoning of traditional construction of a book. It is at the same time a truly original work, controlled by the writer at every stage of its creation* <sup>16</sup>.

Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, researchers of liberature, as its model example consider – due to the advanced or even total organisation of the text, changing also into control over the image of the book – *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce <sup>17</sup>. The readers' attention is raised not only by the language saturated with neologisms but also by the image of the text itself: hundred-letter words, abundance of footnotes, drawings and remarks on the margins of Chapter 2 of Book II. Especially significant is the lack of conventionally understood beginning and end (the end of the text refers us to its beginning) which is generally treated –

according to Bazarnik and Fajfer – as an emblem of the circular and cyclical structure of the work.

This formal wealth and precisely thought out structure are present also in the work by Themersons even though you cannot compare the short film with the book written over 17 years. It seems however that between these works a spiritual affinity can be found. Maybe the key to its understanding is precisely the structure of the film (the end that becomes the new beginning) extending its projection into the eternity. The projection leads us from the beginning to the end but also from the end to the beginning. Thus the reception of the film has a perpendicular character expressed in the formula: AB BA AB BA, etc. The eternally repeating movement gives the film a structural circularity rooted in the repetition itself: even though every event comes back in it an infinite number of times, in the first place the time of perception of the film as a result of continued repetition and cyclical nature of events assumes the form of a circle.

Katarzyna Bazarnik, when analysing the structure of *Finnegans Wake* points to its peculiar character. Let us remind the reader that the novel by Joyce starts with a sentence starting with a small letter and ends in a half sentence<sup>18</sup>. The researcher highlights in the first place the inseparable bond between the content and form<sup>19</sup>. In Joyce's text she finds a structure that in a precise way corresponds to the structure of the globe. The first sentence is not only the beginning of a book but also the continuation of the last sentence. This way the beginning and end are permanently connected pointing to the circular character of the novel (in this case also the book's cover and title pages become significant even before we start reading its proper content).

The reference to the figure of the globe, or rather a model of Earth, that is the geographical net, can also be found on individual pages of the book (also the number of pages counts): *This circularity or rather space-time character of the structure is represented in the precisely calculated number of pages of "Finnegans Wake", since 628 does not seem an accidental number (we obtain it from the formula for the perimeter of a circle  $2\pi r$  after replacing its radius with 100 – a significant number in the book). Thanks to this the total organisation of the text, going even into control over the book as an object itself, aiming at the creative omnipotence author could base his work not on a flat projection of a city – as in "Ulysses" – but on a spatial model of the globe with coordinates of the poles or the equator mathematically calculable on the surface of the volume. These almost unprecedented efforts of the author to control the size of the volume in the work of such a size were reflected in the editor's work. Apart from one edition, which would have to be considered faulty precisely due to the disturbed space of the volume (even though from the literary point of view everything is correct) "Finnegans Wake" is always reissued in the same typographical arrangement and with identical number of pages – i.e. 628<sup>20</sup>.*

According to Joyce, the book *Finnegans Wake* was to contain everything; in its precise structure you cannot separate the form from the content, since one factor in a direct way conditions the other. As Samuel Beckett wrote in his famous essay on Joyce: *Here form is content, content is form. (...) His writing is not about something; it is that something itself*<sup>21</sup>.

Without going deeper into Bazarnik's analysis of Joyce's text, it has to be pointed out that the author left in his novel hints which allow us to read the circular character

of the work (e.g. placing on appropriate pages of the book references to geographical names, of course appropriately distorted, or words taken from languages of different countries located in the book in places corresponding to the geographical location of these countries) in order to enable us to treat *Finnegans Wake* as a work that has “the entire world” inside. Bazarnik underlines the difficulties Joyce’s book caused to subsequent researchers. The very determination that it is a novel seems problematic since it is difficult to separate in it both specific “protagonists” as well as “events” that they apparently participate in<sup>22</sup>. This circularity of the structure constitutes an attempt to render four dimensions in the literary work: one of them is time (both the time of creation of the work and the time of its perception). At the same time the perpendicular “movement” of the projection of the film by the Themersons leads to temporary annihilation of the present time (with – let us recall – linear construction of its narrative), since thanks to the repetition every event has a cyclical character which leads us to understand time as a circle.

The film by the Themersons, especially from the contemporary point of view, can be easily treated as avant-garde, experimental cinema; right after its creation it was rejected by the audience. On the one hand it has a certain linear narrative, on the other it is difficult to treat it literally, to give time and place of the plot, since it is made impossible by the experimental form of the film and scarce information on the protagonist. From the very beginning we are in a way forced to treat the entire story about the adventure of a good citizen in a metaphorical or symbolic way. Of course in the film it is a bit different than in a novel because we can see the protagonist on the screen and we can observe the events in which he participates even if we cannot fully understand them. The end of the Themersons’ film becomes at the same time its new beginning and this resembles the structure of the book by Joyce. But there are more similarities.

Bazarnik also writes about the fact that the world from Joyce’s book is a land of echoes, reflection of reality, and events repeat themselves distorted by multiple reflections. The author underlines also that paradoxically we start reading Joyce’s book from its end, only to come back to its beginning at the end of the book. Vagueness of the narrative was, however, set in very specific, geometrical structures. Well, it seems that the Themersons did a similar thing leaving in their film – seen in the traditional way – hints which allow the spectator to reach its backwards reading. We can see them right from the beginning of the film.

Samuel Beckett points to Joyce’s inspiration with the views of Giordano Bruno through the philosophy of Giambattista Vico. In this case it is worth emphasising the rule of coincidence of opposites referred to by Beckett, which can be another key to reading the Themersons’ film. Beckett writes: *There is no difference, says Bruno, between the smallest possible chord and the smallest possible arc, no difference between the infinite circle and the straight line. The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent. Minimal heat equals minimal cold. Consequently transmutations are circular. The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of another. Therefore not only do the minima coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima with the maxima in the succession of transmutations. Maximal speed is a state of rest. The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation*<sup>23</sup>. Krzysztof Loska notices that

the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*) was taken by Joyce not only from Giordano Bruno but also from the philosophy of Nicholas of Kues<sup>24</sup>.

How can we trace this philosophy in the short film by Themersons? Discovery of this “double” projection of the film means that we cannot look at it anymore only in the traditional way. Every situation presented in the film will be at the same time its own negation; it will be simultaneously the obverse and the reverse of the same situation. We see the journey of the good citizen to the forest aware of the fact that at the end of the backwards projection he will inevitably come back to his desk. The crowd protesting against walking backwards will start walking backwards when the appropriate moment comes. As Beckett wrote, opposites cancel each other out, the minimum and maximum become the same.

This land of echoes that Bazarnik wrote about is also the space of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*. From the very beginning this double nature, pointing both to the self-reference character of the work, is suggested by the authors of the film. So, if we assume that the narrative in classic cinema develops in a linear way, then equal presentation of right and left signals the unusual symmetry of the work’s construction. Every direction is possible, none is privileged. What is more, when we already know that the film can be seen backwards and also backwards in a mirror reflection, then we do not know which frames in the film belong to the traditional projection and which were created as a result of moving the tape backwards. When the protagonist walks backwards, is he moving back? And maybe the authors of the film moved the film tape backwards in order to achieve this effect of movement? These questions remain unanswered and the situation seen on the screen remains without ontological explicitness. Similarly as in the case of *Finnegans Wake* when watching the film inevitably we go back to its beginning.

The film by the Themersons seen backwards becomes a kind of a film palindrome. The sense of this unusual work manifests itself both in the traditional and reverse projection. The concept of a palindrome from the perspective of the already closed work of the Themersons seems to fit ideally the later works by Stefan, especially his interest in semantic poetry and may correspond to the symmetry often present in the drawings by Franciszka<sup>25</sup>.

Since we are analysing the palindrome nature of the film by the Themersons it is worth focusing on two sentences that are spoken in the film. The sentence: *Ladies and gentlemen you have to know the metaphor* read backwards does not change its meaning in any significant way. The situation is different in the case of the first sentence that the protagonist hears in the receiver: *There will be no hole in the sky, even if you walk backwards*. Read backwards (with small deviations that will allow us to maintain its sense) sounds: *You will walk backwards even if there is no hole in the sky*. How can we interpret it? In the first place it may mean the imperative of non-conformism. Secondly, walking backwards may be in this case also read as the inevitability of the avant-garde, that is such understanding of the role of art according to which it constitutes the “advance guard” continuously exceeding the borders and setting new paths and horizons for thinking.

It is also worth pointing out that in *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* the Themersons often use the technique of shot/countershot; it appears in fact at the very beginning. What is interesting, the countershot in the case of this film would mean showing the same figure in the frame<sup>26</sup> but seen from two sides: right and left. In

this way in the first place the protagonist is presented but also the leader of the demonstration or the worker who lifts the wardrobe. The application of the shot/countershot technique allows the spectator to see precisely the same scenes (the only difference is in their beginning, “the first” frame – from right or left side) both in the case of the traditional and backwards projection.

Let us think how we could name this specific construction of the film by the Themersons? The term *film palindrome* does not fully render the features of this construction – the palindrome means a word, sentence or phrase which read both normally and backwards has the same meaning. If we refer to the Greek etymology it appears that the word “palindrome” is a combination of two words: *palin* (return) and *dromos* (path). So how do we call the work read backwards? In linguistics we find names such as “mirror sentences” or “crabs”. It seems however that equally appropriate name in this case might be *anonym*, even though according to the dictionary definition it is a term that refers only to a pseudonym created from a name read backwards<sup>27</sup>. Maybe the same name may be awarded to a sentence or statement read backwards which in this way changes its sense. Or from one more perspective: a word read backwards will constitute a specific type of an anagram.

Maybe we could look at the film by Themersons from yet another point of view, coming back to literature again. It is worth remembering the existence of portmanteau words invented and brought to life by Lewis Carroll in 19<sup>th</sup> century in the books about the adventures of Alice. At present this trick in linguistics is called contamination. According to Maciej Słomczyński, the translator of both Joyce and Carroll into Polish, it is a method also used willingly by James Joyce when writing *Finnegans Wake*. In the preface to the adventures of Alice, that is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Słomczyński writes: *For children “Alice” is a story full of incredible adventures, surprising protagonists, funny poems and sudden changes of action, completely understandable and allowed in the realms of fairytales. For adults “Alice” is a second, next to “Finnegans Wake” by Joyce, masterpiece whose main theme is the analysis of human mind deep in a dream. And just as the language of “Finnegans Wake,” the language of “Alice” is governed by the grammar and rhythm of a ream: intertwining, slowing down, repetition, sudden changes of pace, monotony and succeeding it torn pieces of vision: all this refers to the same extent to the structure of the plot and language. (...) In the realm of language a classical example of a dream montage are today famous portmanteau words from the poem “Jabberwocky” whose meaning is explained to Alice by Humpty-Dumpty. (...) The matter is seemingly very simple: halves of different words connected with each other create a third word which immediately starts to live an autonomous, full – even though previously unknown – life. This merging, permeating and mixing of pieces of a real world Carroll considered the basic right of a dream*<sup>28</sup>.

This merging of different fragments into one whole takes place in the film by the Themersons with the use of the mirror which releases the poetic potential of reality: half-clerk, half-mirror reflection becomes a completely new creation; the hand of a good citizen and its reflection in the mirror unexpectedly transform on the screen into a bird. If we look in the same way at the entire structure of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, it will appear that the film itself becomes precisely a portmanteau film. Its two ideally symmetrical (the same but not the same)



*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, dir. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1937)

parts create a completely new quality which – as Słomczyński wrote – starts to live an autonomous life<sup>29</sup>.

At this point it is worth coming back once more to the logic of a dream to which both Słomczyński and Loska point in the case of *Finnegans Wake*. The latter, referring to the four crucial elements of a dream according to Freud<sup>30</sup> writes about their use by Joyce in the structure of the novel, for example, precisely in the form of portmanteau words (density), related to a certain excess or abundance of associations, as in the form of coincidence of opposites (means of expressions of a dream). In the logic of a dream the category of opposites and contradiction is rejected; similarly as in the film by the Themersons<sup>31</sup>.

All trick shots and carefully composed, symmetrical frames which in the classic reception of the film seem to be simply playful decorations, during the second projection open us onto a completely different level. The film is black and white<sup>32</sup>; already in the first scene right after the frame with drumsticks hitting the bowler hat, in the frame divided in two the inscriptions “right” and “left” appear. As we know, we can interpret them not only as a formal trick but also as referring to the general message of the work: it is at the same time the positive and negative of what we see on screen. The negative of the film tape appears also in the animated, poetic scene in the forest when on the screen we see not only forest animals but in a way also their shadows<sup>33</sup>. Once we discover that the film can be watched both ways and that it is a justified trick, this principle of contrast between the negative-positive appears to refer to the structure of the entire film; every frame seen on screen is simultaneously its negative and positive. Every situation presented on screen is at the same time its own negation; the black and white story additionally underlines this dimension of the film and the film’s logic seems to correspond to the logic of a dream<sup>34</sup>.

Finally we should remember that the films from the period of the so-called Second Film Avant-Garde often referred, not only through names, but in the first place through their structure to musical compositions; it is sufficient to recall *Ballet mé-*

*canique* (1924) by Fernand Léger or *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (Berlin, *Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) by Walter Ruttmann. Themersons in the films *Drobiazg melodyjny* (*Musical moment*), *Zwarcie* (*Short circuit*) or *Oko i Ucho* (*The eye and the ear*), also tried – according to Kluszczyński – to constitute a formal correspondence between a musical work and the picture layer of a film<sup>35</sup>. Deliberations on synaesthesia in cinema are however too vast a topic to go into details in this text. It is worth emphasising that if we look at *The Adventure...* from this perspective, it seems that we can read it in the categories of a musical palindrome, where the formal arrangement of images seen from a symmetrical perspective of its obverse and reverse creates one, precisely composed whole<sup>36</sup>.

This modest, not even 10-minute-long film by the Themersons, thanks to its wealth allows us for a moment – just like the work by Joyce – to look towards the infinity. Paraphrasing Ludwig Wittgenstein: since the limits of my language are the limits of the world, then expansion of the limits of the language – in this case a film one – is at the same time the expansion of the limits of our world. At the end once again the words of Federman: *As such, fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation, or even a recreation of reality; it can only be a reality – an autonomous reality whose only relation to the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth*<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of the film was found after the war and sent to the Central Film Archive in Warsaw. See extra to the DVD *Filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów: “Przygoda człowieka poczciwego”, “Wzywamy pana Smitha”, “Oko i Ucho”, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, LUX, Warszawa 2008, p. 70.*

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> A. Prodeus, *Themersonowie. Szkice biograficzne*, Warszawa 2009, p. 73. I believe that it will be possible to organise a public screening of this film which will reveal all the possibilities this outstanding work offers to the recipients.

<sup>4</sup> Neither Marcin Giżycki in his book *Awangarda wobec kina. Film w kręgu polskiej awangardy artystycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* (Warszawa 1996), nor Ryszard Kluszczyński in the publication *Obrazy na wolności. Studia z historii sztuk medialnych w Polsce* (Warszawa 1998), nor Łukasz Ronduda in the text *Ocalale filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów, “Ha!art” 2007, no. 26* (part of this issue – *Literackie intermedia – twórczość Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów* – was dedicated to the work of the two artists) write about it. Also I, analysing the film in the text *Surfikcja “Przygody człowieka poczciwego” Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów* (“Kwartalnik Filmowy”

2007, no. 57-58, pp. 14-22), omit this unusual aspect of the film.

<sup>5</sup> Giżycki does not take into consideration the lost film *Europa* created by the Themersons in 1931-1932. An idea of the formal wealth of this film can be surely found in *Europa II* made by Piotr Zarębski in 1988. See. L. Koszkało, *Europy (nie)tożsame, “Ha!art” 2007, no. 26, pp. 28-31.*

<sup>6</sup> M. Giżycki, *Kino niezależne Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów*, in: *Awangarda wobec kina...* op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> An ordinary wardrobe placed in a new context becomes in this case an artistic artefact. Action of the Themersons brings to mind the famous gesture of Marcel Duchamp who made a urinal a work of art, anticipating the actions by Andy Warhol (Campbell soup tin).

<sup>8</sup> And maybe during such a backwards projection *The Adventure...* even more clearly reveals its affinity with the European Film Avant-Garde. Namely the Dadaist *Entr'acte* by René Clair of 1924.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Taszycka, op. cit. and R. Federman, *Surfiction: Fiction now... and Tomorrow*, Swallow Press, Chicago 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Maybe this way the film by the Themersons formally is also getting close to the Moebius strip.

- <sup>11</sup> G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, A Dutton Paperback, New York 1970, p. 41; quote after: M. Giżycki, *Kino rozszerzone po trzydziestu latach*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2001, no. 35-36, p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81.
- <sup>13</sup> See R. W. Kluszczyński, *Film – wideo – multimedia*, Kraków 2002, p. 52.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.liberatura.pl/co-to-jest-liberatura.html> (definition published on the website of Małopolski Instytut Kultury which has a literature reading room) (accessed on: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>17</sup> K. Bazarnik, Z. Fajfer, *Historia literatury*, text available at the website: <http://www.liberatura.pl/17591939-czyli-od-tristrama-do-finnegana.html> (accessed on: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>18</sup> First sentence of *Finnegans Wake* is: *riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs*. While the last word written in the book is "the" (without a dot and this sends us back to the first page of Joyce's work).
- <sup>19</sup> K. Bazarnik, *Globalne spojrzenie na "Finnegans Wake"*, in: *Wokół Jamesa Joyce'a*, ed. K. Bazarnik, F. Fordham, Kraków 1998. Bazarnik emphasises that the problems with translation of *Finnegans Wake* result also from the fact that the novel after translation would also have to resemble the structure of the original book, that is, for example end at page 628.
- <sup>20</sup> <http://www.liberatura.pl/1759-1939-czyli-od-tristrama-do-finnegana.html> (accessed: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>21</sup> S. Beckett, *Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce*, in: *idem, Our Examination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, Faber and Faber, London 1972, p. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> K. Bazarnik, *Globalne spojrzenie...* op. cit., p. 143-145.
- <sup>23</sup> S. Beckett, op. cit., p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> K. Loska, "Finnegans Wake" *Jamesa Joyce'a. Rozumienie i interpretacja*, Kraków 2000, p. 30 and 76.
- <sup>25</sup> Apart from the symmetry in the drawings by Franciszka Themerson we can also find a play with "obverse" and "reverse" of the same picture; examples can be found among postcards published by Gaberbocchus Press.
- <sup>26</sup> Usually the counterplane technique is used when filming dialogues.
- <sup>27</sup> An interesting discussion may be found on the website [www.palindromy.pl](http://www.palindromy.pl), hosted by Prof. Tadeusz Morawski, Polish expert on palindromes (see: [http://www.palindromy.pl/pal\\_raki.php](http://www.palindromy.pl/pal_raki.php)). I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Morawski and linguist Ewelina Grzeżkiewicz for consultation.
- <sup>28</sup> M. Słomczyński, *Od tłumacza*, in: L. Carroll, *Przygody Alicji w Krainie Czarów i O tym, co Alicja odkryła po drugiej stronie lustra*, transl. M. Słomczyński, Wrocław 1990, p. 5-6. We have to add that there are quite a number of films which try to render the state of a human mind while asleep; it is enough to recall the pioneer in this area *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) by Luis Buñuel, another work from the times of Great Avant-garde.
- <sup>29</sup> And maybe the good citizen sitting on the roof is a distant reflection of Humpty Dumpty from the book *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. If in Carroll's book the conversation was a kind of game in this case the film itself is the game.
- <sup>30</sup> These are subsequently: 1. densification/condensation, 2. displacement, 3. means of expression of a dream, 4. secondary elaboration. Quoted after: K. Loska, "Finnegans Wake"... op. cit., pp. 109-110.
- <sup>31</sup> It seems that once again the affinity between Themersons and surrealism is confirmed even though Stefan Themerson himself rather renounced it.
- <sup>32</sup> Allegedly in the original version the lyrical sequence in the forest was hand-coloured. See extra to the DVD *Filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów...*, op. cit., p. 70.
- <sup>33</sup> The Themersons probably used in it photographs which were created on a specially designed by Stefan table for animation on which the camera was placed under a glass top lit from all sides by artificial light. (Detailed description of the table can be found in: S. Themerson, *O potrzebie tworzenia widzeń*, Warszawa 2008, p. 60).
- <sup>34</sup> Similar narrative experiments in the cinema, apart from the previously mentioned experiments by the structuralistic and expanded cinema, arouse interest of American cinema on the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, several dozen years after the film by the Themersons. I am thinking about two films which in a specific way experiment with the film narrative: *Palindromes* by Tod Solondz (2004) and *Memento* (2000) by Christopher Nolan.
- <sup>35</sup> R. Kluszczyński, *Obrazy na wolności. Studia z historii sztuk medialnych w Polsce*, Warszawa 1998, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> Music for the film was composed by Stefan Kisielewski.
- <sup>37</sup> R. Federman, op. cit., p. 8.

# Construction – Reproduction

Graphics, photography and film in Polish Constructivism \*

MARCIN GIŻYCKI

An interest in photography and film accompanied the Polish avant-garde from the beginning of its existence. It can be found, among others, in the passion for photography of Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy), a member of the Formists, and in the poems of the Futurists, for example of Tytus Czyżewski and Bruno Jasiński:

*I bathe the plate in golden water  
I copy it on bromo-paper  
and develop your spectral face*<sup>1</sup>

*Cars. Platforms. Cabs.  
A rolling filmstrip  
Grumbling across the stretch of dried asphalt*<sup>2</sup>.

In the Futurist manifesto *Primitivists to the Nations of the World and to Poland*, Anatol Stern and Aleksander Wat called on poets to disseminate their books by using *the gramophone and the cinema*<sup>3</sup>.

The Constructivists were no exception. Władysław Strzemiński even argued that photomontage was a Polish invention and that the title of the inventor should be given to Mieczysław Szczuka<sup>4</sup>. He was wrong, apparently forgetting about much earlier German and Russian achievements (he only mentioned Man Ray). More importantly, however, Strzemiński's text proves how much weight was attached to photography as an artistic medium in the Polish Constructivist milieu.

Photography can be art – argued Strzemiński elsewhere – if it does not imitate painting, and deals only with “the relationship of the interlinked forms”: *Just as naturalism was a disease in nineteenth century painting, so too is the painterly photograph a plague, since it renounces the most important of its tools – sharpness of vision and mechanical perfection*<sup>5</sup>.

In the same review, Strzemiński summarized the most important achievements of contemporary photography:

1) PHOTOGRAPHY FROM NATURE ordinary and in negative (+ and – photograph). Several photographs on a single plate, X-ray images, microphotography.

2) PHOTOMONTAGE – the simultaneity of phenomena/effects – the form resulting from Futurism and Dadaism (Grosz, Heartfield, Szczuka, Lissicki).

\* This text was first published in Italian in the catalogue: *Constructivismo in Polonia*, ed. S. Parlagreco, Torino 2005.

3) PHOTOPLASTICISM – photography without a camera, directly on photosensitive paper, whose effect relies on the use of light and darkness. Photoplasticism accommodates a variety of genres – from abstract shots to those having some contact with nature (Man Ray).

4) Combing photography with painting, creating a sharp contrast between the objective texture of photography and the subjective texture of painting (Max Ernst).

5) Combining photography with printing, often used in advertising <sup>6</sup>.

Strzemiński mentions Witold Kajruksztis as the pioneer of contemporary Polish photography <sup>7</sup>. Yet it is Szczuka's photomontages that are the greatest achievement in this field. First of them appeared in "Blok" magazine, where their author also published the following manifesto:

PHOTOMONTAGE = poetry in its most condensed form

PHOTOMONTAGE = POETRYPLASTICISM

PHOTOMONTAGE produces the effect of interpenetration of the various phenomena taking place in the universe

PHOTOMONTAGE – objectivity of forms

CINEMA – multiplicity of phenomena occurring in time

PHOTOMONTAGE – simultaneous multiplicity of phenomena

PHOTOMONTAGE – interpenetration of two-and three-dimensionality

PHOTOMONTAGE – expands the potential of our methods: it allows the utilization of phenomena which are unavailable to the human eye – but which the sensitive photographic plate can capture

PHOTOMONTAGE – a modern epic <sup>8</sup>

Undoubtedly, Szczuka's works contain features that testify to his personal exploration of the nature of the photomontage. They do not form, as for example the contemporary compositions by Paul Citroën, a "wallpaper" uniformly filled with photographic motifs. They do not create a new, symbolic or paradoxical reality, as the works of the Surrealists do. They are not intentionally anarchist in form like Dada collages.

Closest to Szczuka's photomontages are some of the realizations of the Russian Constructivists: Alexander Rodchenko, El Lissitzky, Gustav Klutis, Lyubova Popova. They do not seem, however, to have had a direct influence on the Polish artist, since even Strzemiński failed to mention them, although he knew the Russian avant-garde at first hand. These associations are thus unlikely to be the result of the influence of any specific works, but arise from convergent theoretical premises, such as the economy of means and a belief in the redundancy of traditional artistic techniques. *Photography and cinema*, wrote Szczuka in the first issue of "Blok", *are unrivalled in accuracy, speed and cheapness in comparison to the artist's work* <sup>9</sup>.

Szczuka's early photomontages (e.g. the cover of Anatol Stern's and Bruno Jasiński's poems *Earth to the Left* <sup>10</sup> or *The Photomontage* in the second issue of "Blok" <sup>11</sup>) stand out, even when compared to related works in Russia, through their lack of any suggestion of space. The third dimension is present only in so far as it is visible in parts of the used photographs. The individual elements of these compositions are, however, spaced out as if on one plane, and comply with the logic of

forms rather than the anecdote. This does not mean, of course, that these elements are semantically insignificant. The frequent motifs of machines and iron structures, sometimes of workers too, in Szczuka's works are in full compliance with his social and aesthetic beliefs: his belief in the superiority of the principles of engineering over the genius of creativity and in the working people's role in shaping the new reality.

Szczuka was in fact aware that the use of recognizable pieces of photographs, particularly of people, unavoidably creates the germ of an anecdote. Discussing examples of "purely constructional issues", he wrote (with the typically telegraphic language of constructivist manifestos): (...) *composition with a starting point no longer of building the textural painterly contrasts or the texture of materials – but building contrasts between objects and living things – as a consequence the inevitable literary quality* <sup>12</sup>.

The "literary quality" of Szczuka's photomontages increased as they became more and more political. His earlier works mainly expressed a fascination with the mechanization of production that the artist and his colleagues naively thought was to bring workers better wages, by cheapening the cost of production <sup>13</sup>, whereas his later photomontages and related prints from the second half of the 1920s were increasingly fighting for specific issues, such as the release of political prisoners <sup>14</sup> or the improvement of working conditions in bakeries <sup>15</sup>. This change in the artist's work is linked to his deepening knowledge of Marxism, taking place around 1926 <sup>16</sup>.

Szczuka's most important achievement during this period was to design graphic illustrations for the poem *Europe* by Anatol Stern <sup>17</sup>. The published illustrations (except for the title page designed by Teresa Żarnower) are not photomontages in the literal sense, but a combination of typographical characters and traced out fragments of photographs, yet they grew from the spirit of collage, for they juxtapose elements taken from different contexts. Images are arranged in a kind of film running independently along the poem, sometimes accentuating, sometimes counterpointing it. The whole thing is complemented by its unconventional typographical layout: strong red backgrounds and black and red borders surrounding parts of the text.

The photomontages closest to Szczuka's poetics were created by Teresa Żarnower, his life-long companion and closest associate. Examples include her political posters and the (aforementioned) cover for *Europa*. Some of the graphic designs by Szczuka and Żarnower have very similar lettering and identical components, raising the suspicion that they were in fact their collective work <sup>18</sup>. Yet the most important and poignant series of photomontages, created by the artist when she lived as an expatriate in New York, were for the book *Defense of Warszawa* <sup>19</sup>.

At the turn of the 1920s, photomontage became a popular illustrative technique and started to appear regularly in the pages of magazines and on book covers, which were not necessarily left-wing. These illustrations were often created by artists associated with the wider circles of Polish Constructivism, such as Henryk Stażewski, Bogdan Lachert, Kazimierz Podsadecki or Mieczysław Berman. While the first two worked with photomontage only sporadically, Podsadecki and Berman devoted themselves to it with great assiduity.

Podsadecki is the author of probably the most frequently reproduced Polish photomontage, *City – Mill of Life*, designed for the cover of the weekly magazine

“Na szerokim świecie” (“In the Wide World”) <sup>20</sup>, which expressed a fascination with the big city and skyscrapers that was typical for the 1920s avant-garde. Podsadecki published many similar compositions in the magazines “Światowid” and “Na szerokim świecie”, where he was art director, and which belonged to the group IKC (“Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny” / “Illustrated Daily Courier”). These works show similarities with the photomontages of artists associated with the Bauhaus, especially the cycle by Otto Umbehr (Umbo) for the advertising campaign for Walter Ruttmann’s film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (the cycle is usually wrongly attributed to Ruttmann himself).

In addition to the illustrations made for the press, Podsadecki also produced a series of satirical photomontages, presented during *Żywe dzienniki* (*Live News*) – quasi-film nights, where the projection of films was replaced with slides showing the artist’s works and cabaret scenes by the members of the Studio of Polish Avant-Garde Film, an association which he co-founded. These compositions, however, were already far removed from the formal discipline of Szczuka’s Constructivism. The same is true for most of the photomontages by another member of SPAF, Janusz Maria Brzeski, whose cycle *Narodziny robota* (*Birth of a Robot*), leaning towards Surrealism (and the prose of Karel Čapek), is one of the most outstanding Polish achievements in this field.

The only Polish artist who devoted himself entirely to photomontage was Mieczysław Berman, who together with Anatol Stern co-authored Szczuka’s monograph <sup>21</sup>. Unfortunately, the earliest, decidedly Constructivist works by the artist have not survived and can only be judged on the basis of reconstructions Berman made after the war. We have to agree with Stanisław Czekalski that their dating to the late 1920s raises many doubts. The first published works appeared in the following decade, and the sporadic statements by the author rather confirm the supposition that he was not using photomontage earlier than this <sup>22</sup>. We are also concerned with the meticulous appearance of these reconstructions, their perfection of composition, not to mention the obvious elements of a later period, such as a portrait of an elderly Charlie Chaplin or New York skyscrapers non-existent before 1939. Photomontage was an ad hoc form of art. Its attraction consisted, among other things, in the fact that it could be created quickly and from what was at hand. Inspiration mostly came from the press and from life. Berman’s reconstructions look like carefully made variations, or even fantasies, on the subject of the originals, if these ever existed (at least in such numbers) <sup>23</sup>.

This does not, however, change the fact that Berman was the most important Polish photomontage artist after Szczuka. His early works, published in magazines during the years 1930-1931, already revealed a pro-Soviet and propagandist character (*Bezrobocie /Unemployment/, 1930*), and at times seemed inspired by the works of Gustav Klutis (such as the cover of the book by Melchior Wańkiewicz, *Opiersona rewolucja /The Fully Fledged Revolution/, in 1934* <sup>24</sup>) and other Soviet graphic artists. Soon afterwards, however, they began to gravitate towards the political satire of John Heartfield, an artist with whom Berman shared a deep friendship after the war <sup>25</sup>.

Photomontages more or less inspired by Constructivism were also created by other well-known artists, including the set designer Władysław Daszewski, the painter Aleksander Rafałowski, the writer and filmmaker Stefan Themerson, the

painter and typographer Janusz Maria Brzeski, or the photographer and architect (later turned psychologist) Mieczysław Choynowski. A second division consisted of at least a dozen artists, among whom the most notable were Jan Poliński and Włodzimierz Łukasik.

This group of works was obviously dominated by urban and industrial subjects: high buildings, steel bridges and other structures, factories, motor vehicles. From the beginning of the 1930s, however, elements of political satire began to increasingly appear, cultivated by both left- and right-wing supporters. *America*, an excellent photomontage by Choynowski in the socialist-oriented “Wiadomości Literackie” (“Literary News”) <sup>26</sup>, shows a cluster of skyscrapers from which a pair of cuffed hands emerges, reaching towards the Statue of Liberty visible in the upper right corner. In Poliński’s work, *Tzw. Życie gospodarcze* (*The So-called Economic Life*), which appeared in the right-wing nationalist organ “Prosto z mostu” (“Point-Blank”) <sup>27</sup>, the figure of a begging woman with a child stands out against the background of a stereotypical factory, car and crowd.

The process of the photomontage’s politicization was accompanied by criticism of its “formalist” variant. Formalism, testifying to *the reduction of matters of art to the format of simple laboratory methods*, became the subject of attacks by Władysław Daszewski <sup>28</sup>, among others, who also incidentally took over Żarnower’s position of graphic editor in the magazine “Dźwignia” (“The Lever”), founded by Szczuka.

Independently, photomontage of Surrealist rather than Constructivist origin began to develop. Its most outstanding exponents were Aleksander Krzywobłocki, Margit Sielska, Jerzy Janisch and Henryk Streng (Marek Włodarski) <sup>29</sup>, associated with the Lvov group “Artes”; the graphic partnership Lewitt and Him <sup>30</sup>; the Warsaw satirist Zenon Wasilewski, who worked for “Szpilki” (“Pins”) as a graphic artist; and once again Stefan Themerson.

Constructivist graphics was subject to essentially the same rules as photomontage: economy of means and usefulness of form. It could be the illustration of almost scientific visual deliberations, the object of typographical experiments or used in advertising. But it has almost completely disappeared in its pure form, the engraving. The latter was regarded as a relic of the previous era, of the bourgeois taste.

The principles of Constructivist graphic design in advertising (these can also be applied to its other usages) were formulated best in the prospectus of Biuro Reklama-Mechano (Bureau Advertising-Mechano) set up (supposedly as a joke) by Henryk Berlewi (art director), Aleksander Wat and Stanisław Brucz (texts): *The conventionality of the graphic system, the banality of texts, the outdated, tedious to the modern eye aesthetic decorations, no longer attract attention from the reader, the spectator, the passer-by. So we are advancing a new slogan: MECHANICAL ADVERTISING. Advertising must be based on the same principles as those dominating modern industrial production* <sup>31</sup>.

The prospectus, one of the most important Polish functional prints, was itself an example of such advertising. The text was positioned both vertically and horizontally and individual sentences or single words (sometimes even fragments of words) differed in font size in order to underline their meanings and to impose on

the reader a method of reading. Abstract geometric shapes – circles, squares, rectangles – served to strengthen the expression of the text, sometimes framing it, sometimes next to it. “R.-M.” (*mechanical advertising*) *invigorates the literary text of advertisement with shortcuts, sharp focus and momentum by using the latest developments of modern literature, creating a mechanical style of advertising text*<sup>32</sup> – declares one of the pages of the prospectus, whose layout resembles Berlewi’s painted compositions from the period.

The concept of mechanical advertising grew directly from Berlewi’s theory of *Mechano-Faktura*, contained in his manifesto of the same title<sup>33</sup>. In it the artist argued that the rejection of figurative elements and the order make it possible *to recognize the artist’s intention (...) as well as the precision that helps everyone to organize the impressions received from a work of art*<sup>34</sup>.

Berlewi explains how perception of the mechano-factual image should take place in practice in his article on Polish functional design published in “*Neue Grafik*” in 1961<sup>35</sup>. Discussing his work, *Mechano-facture; Dynamic contrasts* (1924), the artist wrote: *The reading of this two-part graphic layout should start with the thin line in the lower right corner. It widens as it moves upwards; it strengthens and passes „crescendo” into a wide stripe. When a viewer (or listener) reaches the peak of this rise, as if played on a xylophone, he begins to descend, led by a row of five squares. Then he should move horizontally, from the smallest to the largest black circle. From that place, the eye moves to the right in accordance with a succession of graded black stripes. The circles form a finale*<sup>36</sup>. The eye of the reader of a mechanical advertisement should not follow the traditional line-based layout of text, but the dynamics of typographical forms. The whole composition should work like a machine: precisely, accurately and purposely.

The theory of *Mechano-Faktura* was created with painting in mind, but was also perfectly suitable for graphics, as it intended to use non-individualised, mechanical forms, which could be reproduced using templates or ready dies.

Similar geometric forms, often created with typographical elements available at the printer, were used in graphic compositions by Teresa Żarnower, whom Berlewi consistently and unjustly deprecated in his statements<sup>37</sup>. Works by her reproduced in “*Blok*” are, however, characterized by a leaning towards symmetry (albeit always slightly disturbed) and enclosure in a rectangular frame. In the previously cited *Three examples of purely structural issues*<sup>38</sup>, Żarnower’s untitled work was described as follows: *2. a static composition: symmetrical (applied in this example) SURFACE LAYOUT. A structure of verticals and horizontals.*

The above description is also appropriate to other compositions by Żarnower, for example, one published on the title page of the fifth issue of “*Blok*”<sup>39</sup>. Berlewi wrote years later about the latter that its *symmetrical form provides a breath of simplicity*, in which we can discern the influence of Neo-Plasticism<sup>40</sup>. But there are also works by the artist, such as *Kompozycja typograficzna (Typographical Composition)* in the same issue of “*Blok*”, or *Konstrukcja filmowa (Film Construction)*<sup>41</sup>, which are an attempt to enhance the scheme by the use of ellipses and convergent lines (in the first example) and wavy lines and wedges (in the second example). *Film Construction* shows similarities with Szczuka’s *5 Moments of an Abstract Film* (which will be discussed later), included in the first issue of “*Blok*”<sup>42</sup>.

Żarnower's typographical compositions, even if inspired by Neo-Plasticism, are nevertheless easily recognizable as her own, and constitute an interesting group of works that refer to the most elementary forms, taken, in accordance with the demands of Constructivism, from ready-made models, both mechanical and industrial.

Also noteworthy are abstract compositions by some artists consisting exclusively of letters and close to concrete poetry. These types of works were made, among others, by Edmund Miller<sup>43</sup>, Strzemiński<sup>44</sup>, and Szczuka<sup>45</sup>, and later also by Strzemiński's pupil Samuel Szczekacz (Samuel Zur). Many of these experiments were adopted by functional typography and found creative use in the graphic designs by Strzemiński or Podsadecki. Strzemiński's covers for Tadeusz Peiper's<sup>46</sup> or Julian Przyboś's<sup>47</sup> books – probably the most outstanding realizations in Polish artistic books – show, moreover, that functionalism did not have to lead to excessive discipline.

A separate phenomenon in Polish Constructivist graphics are the heliographics, created from 1928 onwards by Karol Hiller and closely related to his abstract paintings of the same period, sometimes compared to Willi Baumeister's or Vladimir Tatlin's<sup>48</sup> work. Heliographics were photographic compositions made without a camera, where the negative was replaced by hand-made celluloid plate covered with white tempera and then painted, scratched and rinsed until the desired effect was achieved. Some of the works from the mid-1930s (e.g. item no. 6 in the Essen exhibition catalogue<sup>49</sup>) anticipate Art Informel, especially Wols. Others create fantastic openwork structures suspended in space (e.g. item 4, *ibid.*<sup>50</sup>) and others still are close to the Suprematism of Malevich and Lissitzky (e.g., item 8, *ibid.*<sup>51</sup>).

In his statement article of 1934, Hiller wrote that by being subject to the laws of chemical processes, the artist gets closer to the phenomena observed in science and recorded with the help of photomicrography. He also expressed the belief that by adapting the methods used in the laboratory to those of artistic creation, the field of graphic exploration expands and is freed from the ballast of traditional techniques, such as oil painting, which are a barrier between art and nature<sup>52</sup>.

Hiller's conviction that form should be organically linked with the material used resonates with distant echoes of theory of Unism expounded by Strzemiński, with whom the creator of heliographics would soon quarrel and part<sup>53</sup>. But of course at the core of heliographics, above all, lies the Constructivist belief that art ought to be close to technique, and the latter should grow from knowledge of the laws of nature.

Stefan Themerson was also the author of outstanding photograms (photographs without camera). Experiments with exposing photographic paper covered with various objects led him (and his wife Franciszka, a painter) to filmmaking. The first of their films, *Apteka (Pharmacy)*, made in 1930, was created by animating glass objects, placed on tracing paper and filmed from below. Another film *Europa*, made during the years 1931-1932, was closely related to the achievements of Polish Constructivism, as it was in fact inspired by Anatol Stern's poem of the same title, graphically illustrated by Szczuka.

The Themersons, however, did not reuse Szczuka's drawings in their film, using instead, along with other materials, Themerson's photomontages, some of which were fortunately preserved, unlike the film. A fragment of the script of *Europa*, re-

constructed years later by its authors, reveals to us how they were used: (...) *panorama following photomontages – a series of the artist's photomontages – penetration, revealing by means of light, etc., including a montage of a sky-scraper; cut by scissors from top, still by still (...)* <sup>54</sup>.

*Europa*, together with *Beton (Concrete)* by Janusz Maria Brzeski, *Or* by Jalu Kurek, and *Zwarcie (Short Circuit)* by the Themersons, belongs to the few completed Polish films that to a greater or lesser degree refer to Constructivism. Unfortunately most Constructivist film projects were abandoned at the stage of drafts and ideas.

The Constructivists' early interest in cinema is evidenced by Kryński's and Żarnower's statements in *Katalog Wystawy Nowej Sztuki (New Art Exhibition Catalogue)* <sup>55</sup>. Both had called for making more use of film, in addition to other modern means, as a discipline in touch with the spirit of the times. The Vilnius exhibition was *nota bene* held in the lobby of the cinema "Corso", which is also significant.

Of the artists participating in the exhibition, the closest to actually making a film was probably Szczuka. In the inaugural issue of "Blok", he posted a drawing *5 Moments of an Abstract Film* <sup>56</sup>, which should be considered the first Polish abstract film study. It recorded what looks like five phases (they are not clearly delineated) of the film, whose ratio of duration probably corresponds to the ratio of length of the five sections of the straight line (time axis) at the bottom of the composition. It is difficult to say how these "moments" are spaced in time and if there is a sequence of "action" at all. A closer analysis of the drawing, however, shows a similarity between several elements in different phases, suggesting their movement and transformation <sup>57</sup>.

A little later, Szczuka returned to a similar problem in "Blok" with the drawing *A Few Essential Elements of an Abstract Film* <sup>58</sup>. It is a kind of graphic catalogue of the available forms and methods of such a film, presented as a fragment of imaginary film footage. Next to it these are listed: *Movement as change in place: the coming and going, but not changing, of geometrical forms. The dynamics of forms: reduction or enlargement of forms, transformation of forms, the disintegration or construction of forms. Intensity of colour. Vividness or dimness of appearance, direction (directions) of movement (movements), and the inter-penetration of shapes. Tempo. Harmony – disharmony. Pauses* <sup>59</sup>.

In 1927, Szczuka had begun to seriously prepare for the making of a film. From this project, most likely entitled *Zabił, zabiłeś, zabilem (He Killed, You Killed, I Killed)*, only two drawing-frames (quite unusual, because they are square) remain. They are marked with the numbers "15" and "16" but they seem quite far apart. We can only guess that the large irregular black spot in the first drawing is transformed, through reduction and slight rotation in the counter-clockwise direction, into a small shape reminiscent of an upside down letter "J".

Written words are a new element in relation to the aforementioned works: "you killed" appears twice (frame 15) as does a large "I" (frame 16). The use of words and typographical characters as the main dynamic elements of the screen composition was a proposal comparable probably only to assigning an autonomous function to inscriptions in *Mechanical Ballet* by Fernand Léger, *Anaemic Cinema* by Marcel Duchamp, and in some of Dziga Vertov's films. Unfortunately, this is more or less all we can say about this unrealized project. But we can speculate, taking

into the account the radicalization of Szczuka's views, and his involvement in communist propaganda, that the film *He Killed, You Killed, I Killed* was to carry a political message.

*Film Construction* by Teresa Żarnower, bearing the date 1923 and published in "Blok"<sup>60</sup>, remains the most enigmatic Polish Constructivist film concept. Is it a kind of a still frame of an imaginary abstract film, or a work only related to cinema by the use of dynamic elements such as the almost op-art wavy lines and narrow wedges, arranged in a manner strongly suggesting movement? This will probably remain an unanswered question.

Henryk Berlewi acknowledged years later the cinematic origins of his own work, especially the influence of abstract films by Viking Eggeling<sup>61</sup>. The startling interview which the artist gave in 1958 in the weekly magazine "Film" shows that his *mechano-factura* was a substitute for film: *My entire theory of mechano-facture then (...) in reality demanded animation, motion, a film. Explanation of this theory is only possible with the help of film. The fundamental nature of mechano-facture depends on the build up of certain rhythms and on the systematic differentiation of texture [facture]. In "mechano-facture constructions" I am trying to include the element of time – obviously it would be best done by film*<sup>62</sup>.

Little is known about Karol Hiller's film project. *Long before the release of "Metropolis"* – reported the well-known critic Karol Ford<sup>63</sup> – *the renowned and respected painter Karol Hiller wrote the script "And When the Earth Cools Down..."*, in which he raises almost identical issues, resolving them differently from *Thea von Harbou*<sup>64</sup>. Unfortunately neither the script nor the stage designs made for it were preserved (compared to the decoration in *Aelita* by Yakov Protazanov, co-authored with Aleksandra Exter).

In the 1930s, however, at least three more films were made (apart from the previously discussed *Europa*) which to some extent were a continuation of Constructivist ideas. The first one is *Or*, or *Obliczenia rytmiczne (Rhythmic Calculations)*, made by the poet Jalu Kurek in 1932. The author wrote the following about the film: "*Or*" – *is an abbreviation of the rather lengthy title "Rhythmic Calculations". The film is short (220 meters – 8 minutes) and illustrates the random visual coincidence of images and an expression of directional tensions. The images were organized in a certain order, the result of artistic thought, and were taken off at a pace that is the result of formal calculations*<sup>65</sup>. "Directional tensions", "formal calculations" – this of course is the language of Constructivist manifestos.

The film has not survived in its complete form but fortunately numerous fragments are preserved (duplicates of shots, rushes, etc.), and on the basis of this (and also on Kurek's own account<sup>66</sup>) and other reports, one can quite accurately form an opinion about its form<sup>67</sup>. The film footage used in *Or* can be arranged in three groups: 1. Inscriptions (*The inscription/subtitle as such does not exist in "Or", because in its previous function it constitutes an element external to film, which should be avoided. Whereas there are in "Or" inscriptions incorporated into the whole picture, as an element equal and harmonizing with the background, with which it blends and in which it moves*<sup>68</sup>). 2. Animated diagrams, such as the diagrams of the solar system and the heart. 3. Photographs "from life" (including those with actors).

The first group formed a kind of poetic message, stating that everything in the universe happens rhythmically and cyclically: *the universe is spinning in a constant*

*rhythm, fluid and circular, or human life lies in the rhythm of the heart, measuring the work of the blood, etc. The second set the pulsating rhythm of the montage. The third contained a trace of a simple and uncomplicated action* <sup>69</sup> – a meeting between a man and a woman in the park. The continuity of the remnants of the story was broken, however, and together with the rest of the material they were made into a casual, though sometimes also metaphorical (as in the final scene, where the protagonists, heading in opposite directions along the avenue, were shown together with the image of a knot untying itself), flow of associated images. Moreover, in accordance with Kurek's view on the presence of faces on screen (*a theatre prop, commonly parasitizing on our emotions* <sup>70</sup>), the whole event was primarily photographed in close-ups of legs. There were, moreover, legs unconnected with the park tryst, for example, of people sitting indoors, climbing stairs, etc. (*The film can be called a lyrical transposition of girls' legs in motion; this motif is the dominant rhythm in "Or"* <sup>71</sup>). In the film, *there was no human face as a separate plan in order to document that it is possible to show action, movement, tempo and drama on screen without needing the expression of a human face i.e. an acting facial expression*) <sup>72</sup>.

Kurek – the most fervent follower of Italian Futurism in Poland and Marinetti's translator – must have borrowed the idea of a film which exclusively featured legs from Marcel Fabre and his *Amor pedestre* of 1914. But some elements of the text and graphics, such as a board with the inscription running diagonally *expression of directional tensions* and three arrows, were strongly marked by Constructivism. This undoubtedly eclectic picture helped, however, along with the Themersons' work, disseminate the idea of Western film avant-garde in Poland.

Two films by Janusz Maria Brzeski were another attempt to put the theory of this avant-garde into practice. The first one, *Przekroje* (*Sections*), made in 1931, was a montage of *various bits of film* <sup>73</sup>, and thus a cinematic collage. According to the journalist from "As" ("Ace") magazine, it was *probably the first attempt at a content-free film in Poland* <sup>74</sup>. The premiere of *Przekroje* was held during the Exhibition of Modernist Photography at the Industrial Museum in Krakow, organized by Brzeski and Podsadecki, which displayed, among others, works by Hans Richter, László Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray. Unfortunately, this is more or less everything we know about this lost film.

More can be said about the second film, entitled *Beton* (*Concrete*, 1933). It opened with a photomontage in the spirit of Constructivism, showing a jacket resting on an invisible man, and the head of a lady with an old-fashioned hairstyle, incorporated in an abstract arrangement of geometric elements. After that an inscription/subtitle appeared: *The world has learned to look at modern panoramas and believe in their safe charms. Concrete stands are full of spectators. Humanity is looking upward and forgets about the street level, from which it was raised to the gods* <sup>75</sup>.

The first part of the film was probably (the work is lost) a documentary sequence, presenting a multiplicity of faces of a big city. *Wandering with a camera through the suburbs, the old city, right up to the modern high-rise concrete buildings – [Brzeski] wanted against this backdrop to show a man who raises the walls of the city, who works on its splendour, and who dies doing this work* <sup>76</sup>. The transition from the old town to the "concrete" area was done *via the railway line, whose identification in the play of geometric figures gave the critic a real pleasure* <sup>77</sup>.

It is worth recalling here that the famous film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, by Walter Ruttmann, which indisputably influenced Brzeski, also opened with a half-minute abstract sequence of rhythmically intersecting geometric forms, developing into a variation on the theme of a speeding train, ending with its arrival at the station.

Somewhere high up on the construction site, the camera spotted a bricklayer at work (incidentally played by Kazimierz Podsadecki). *The proud, powerful silhouette of the worker looks impressive on top of the building* – enthused the previously quoted critic<sup>78</sup>. The film, however, was not, as one might think a paean to work in the Soviet style, for the whole story ended tragically. When a pair of hands (*which were not of concrete*<sup>79</sup>) stretched towards the hero from below: *He bent forward. He tumbled down. Blood on the concrete*<sup>80</sup>.

Despite the rapid montage of some scenes and the images from the constructing site, the bricks, the machines, *Concrete* expressed a characteristic change in views on industrialization, which was slowly taking place in the Polish artistic circles of the late 1920s and 1930s. After a period of admiration for iron structures, chimneys, motor vehicles – there came a reflection that they do not automatically create a paradise on earth. One of the first signs of this disillusion was the poem *Europe* by Anatol Stern. The new spirit of catastrophism was expressed in the excellent cycle of photomontages by Brzeski, *Birth of a Robot* (1934), made after *Concrete*.

In the author's commentary to the cycle, Brzeski wrote: *THE MACHINE WILL KILL INDIVIDUALITY (...) The work of these men, who have not yet been replaced by a machine, was organized on the model of machines. (...) Individuality is superfluous. (...) MAN IS A SLAVE TO THE MACHINE (...). If you go to any large factory (...) you will understand that man is a miserable slave of today's very modern caste of machine rulers, who are already close to the decision: death to man who awoke our power...*<sup>81</sup>

These words, sounding almost like a death knell for Polish Constructivism, were spoken by someone who had only recently cried to his fellow filmmakers that topics “lie about in the street” and gave such examples as: “Smoke”, “Coal”, “Machine”, and “Kerosene”<sup>82</sup>.

Graphics made of typographical elements, photomontage, film, and especially film collage, seemed an ideal means for the implementation of Constructivist ideas. They were mostly made from ready-made elements, prefabricated ones, and just as machine-made objects, were suitable for reproduction. Precisely in these fields one of the basic postulates of Constructivism was most fully realized: turning to new materials. As Andrzej Turowski rightly pointed out, despite the Constructivists constantly calling for the use of new components and substances, in practice they were little used<sup>83</sup>. Thus, even more significant is what was created in the artistic fields discussed here.

It is also interesting to track down the evolution that happened in these areas within a short period of time. From *building contrasts between objects and living things*, in which literary character was just an inevitable consequence of Szczuka's early photomontages, to his hand-drawn illustrations with a map of Europe and the inscription “SOS” (in the 1929 edition of Stern's poem); from the purely abstract, extremely disciplined geometric compositions by Żarnower, to her election poster

with a huge fist smashing a prison; from the purely montage-like film *Sections* by Brzeski, to his dystopian and anti-industrial *Birth of a Robot*.

This transformation was not such a betrayal of earlier ideals as one might think. For, as Żarnower wrote in the *New Art Exhibition Catalogue: (...) the means of art are associations of forms, which in every historical period take new shapes (...)*<sup>84</sup>. The Polish Constructivists lived in a specific period of rapidly changing historical context. After a short period of euphoria following the regaining of independence, which favoured the creation of utopias, came the time to adapt to daily reality, which was far from ideal, and to opt for one of the many conflicting political views. The majority chose the left-wing option; some, like Szczuka, Żarnower or Berman – the extreme left-wing.

The writer Deborah Vogel interestingly and provocatively summed up the dilemmas of new art (using the example of photomontage): *Using random material found in illustrated magazines and among reproductions is not enough. These newspaper clippings are tacky and they “cheapen”<sup>85</sup>; they are too easy to please in their naive situational naturalism. The belief that we can capture “authentic life” this way is wrong. We must risk the opinion that facts become authentic only from a perspective, and thus after a certain interpretation of raw material*<sup>86</sup>.

Today of course, we see in this *naive situational naturalism*, and in the naive belief that through art we can rebuild the world, the special charm of the Constructivist utopia.

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Translated by KATARZYNA KRZYŻAGÓRSKA-PISAREK

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<sup>1</sup> T. Czyżewski, *Mediumiczno-magnetyczna fotografia poety Brunona Jasińskiego (zdjęta przy świetle gilotynowym)*, in: H. Zaworska, *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i Nowej Sztuki*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1978, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> B. Jasiński, *Przejechali – Kinematograf*, English translation available at: <http://pressboardpress.com/2012/08/06/they-ran-him-over-by-bruno-jasienski-translated-by-mila-jaroniec/> (accessed: 30.11.2013).

<sup>3</sup> A. Stern, A. Wat, *Primitivists to the Nations of the World and to Poland*, in: *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. M. A. Cows, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 2001, pp. 100-101.

<sup>4</sup> W. Strzemiński, *Fotomontaż wynalazkiem polskim („Europa” Szczuki i A. Sterna)*, in: idem, *Pisma*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich 1975, pp. 123-124.

<sup>5</sup> W. Strzemiński, review of *Foto-Auge* by Tschichold and Roh, in: idem, *Pisma*, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> M. Szczuka, *Fotomontaż*, “Blok” 1924, no. 6-7.

<sup>9</sup> M. Szczuka, *Odczuwa się w całokształcie życia*, “Blok” 1924, no. 1.

<sup>10</sup> A. Stern, B. Jasiński, *Ziemia na lewo*, Warszawa 1924.

<sup>11</sup> M. Szczuka, *Montaż fotograficzny*, “Blok” 1924, no. 2.

<sup>12</sup> M. Szczuka, *Trzy przykłady zagadnień czysto konstrukcyjnych*, “Blok” 1924, no. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Strzemiński, for example, wrote after some time: *It seemed that the development of productive forces in conjunction with the rising tide of the economic situation automatically generates the most perfect resulting political systems, liberating mankind from the bondage of history* (idem, *Aspekty rzeczywistości*, “Forma” 1936, no. 5).

<sup>14</sup> Covers of the one-off issues: *Amnesty for Political Prisoners* and *We demand Amnesty for Political Prisoners* (both: Kraków and Warszawa 1926).

<sup>15</sup> A canvassing label reproduced in “Dźwignia” (“The Lever”) (1927, no. 2-3) as part of

- Szczuka's photomontage *Nowa sztuka – sztuka użyteczna* (*New Art – utilitarian art*).
- <sup>16</sup> A. Stawar, *Szkice literackie*, Warszawa 1957, pp. 618-623.
- <sup>17</sup> A. Stern, *Europa*, Warszawa 1929 (facsimile edition in English: A. Stern *Europa*, Gaberbocchus Press, London 1962). S. Czekański (*Awangarda i mit racjonalizacji. Fotomontaż polski okresu dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Poznań 2000, p. 85, note 70), on the basis of Stern's memories dates Szczuka's illustrations to 1926. Unfortunately Stern's testimony should be approached with extreme caution.
- <sup>18</sup> A poster by T. Żarnower *13. Jedność Robotniczo-Chłopska* (*Workers and Peasants Unity*) and Szczuka's book cover to *Amnestia dla więźniów politycznych* (*Amnesty for Political Prisoners*) (op. cit.).
- <sup>19</sup> *Obrona Warszawy. Lud polski w obronie stolicy* (September 1939), New York 1942.
- <sup>20</sup> "Na szerokim świecie" 1929, no. 27.
- <sup>21</sup> A. Stern, M. Berman, *Mieczysław Szczuka*, Warszawa 1965.
- <sup>22</sup> M. Berman, *Czapka Frygijska*, in: *Księga wspomnień 1919-1939*, Warszawa 1960, p. 87.
- <sup>23</sup> I have had many occasions to talk to Berman during the years 1973-1975 (just before he died), when I wrote my master's thesis about his friend, Zenon Wasilewski. During these meetings Berman proved to have an excellent memory. Backdating his own works could not therefore be the result of forgetfulness.
- <sup>24</sup> M. Wańkowicz, *Opierzona rewolucja*, Warszawa 1934.
- <sup>25</sup> It is worth mentioning that Berman's pro-Soviet attitude gradually evolved into Trotskyism, probably from the time of his book cover design for *History of the Russian Revolution* by Trotsky (Warszawa 1932), which eventually led to his ejection from the Communist group Phrygian Cap.
- <sup>26</sup> "Wiadomości Literackie" 1932, no. 3.
- <sup>27</sup> "Prosto z mostu" 1935, no. 5. The same Poliński is the author of the explicitly anti-Semitic photomontage *Ubój rytualny* (*Ritual Slaughter*) ("Prosto z mostu" 1936, no. 9). The example of the two photomontages discussed above shows how easily the radical Left met the populist extreme Right.
- <sup>28</sup> W. Daszewski, *Na marginesie wystawy „Warszawskiej Grupy Plastyków”*, "Oblicze dnia" 1936, no. 11.
- <sup>29</sup> The best-known photomontage by Włodarski (*Untitled*, 1927, Museum of Art in Łódź) strongly resembles, however, Rodchenko's works.
- <sup>30</sup> Jan Lewitt and Jerzy (George) Him.
- <sup>31</sup> *Prospekt Biura Reklama-Mechano*, Warszawa 1924.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>33</sup> H. Berlewi, *Mechano-Faktura*, Warszawa 1924.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>35</sup> H. Berlewi, *Funktionelle Grafik der zwanziger Jahre in Polen*, an offprint from: "Neue Grafik" 1961, no. 9.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.
- <sup>37</sup> H. Berlewi, *Nieco o dawnej awangardzie. Kilka uwag z powodu artykułu pana A. Wata o "Blok"*, "Życie Literackie" 1957, no. 27, p. 5.
- <sup>38</sup> M. Szczuka, *Trzy przykłady...* op. cit.
- <sup>39</sup> "Blok" 1924, no. 5.
- <sup>40</sup> H. Berlewi, *Funktionelle Grafik...* op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>41</sup> "Blok" 1924, no. 8-9.
- <sup>42</sup> M. Szczuka, *Pięć momentów filmu abstrakcyjnego*, "Blok" 1925, no. 1.
- <sup>43</sup> E. Miller, untitled typographical composition, "Blok" 1924, no. 2. Earlier on (December 1921), Miller showed some lettering posters on display in the Polish Arts Club at the "Polonia" hotel in Warszawa. Perhaps this work tells us something about these posters, which unfortunately did not survive.
- <sup>44</sup> W. Strzemiński, untitled typographical composition, "Blok" 1924, no. 2.
- <sup>45</sup> M. Szczuka, *Typografia*, "Blok" 1924, no. 3-4.
- <sup>46</sup> T. Peiper, *Szosta! Szósta!* Kraków 1926.
- <sup>47</sup> E.g. J. Przyboś, *Śruby*, Kraków 1925; idem, *Z ponad*, Kraków 1930.
- <sup>48</sup> J. Ładnowska, *Karol Hiller*, in: *Constructivism in Poland, 1923-1936: Blok, Praesens, a. r.*, ed. R. Stanisławski, Essen 1973, p. 125.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.
- <sup>52</sup> K. Hiller, *Heliografika jako nowy rodzaj techniki graficznej*, "Forma" 1934, no. 2.
- <sup>53</sup> After a conflict with Strzemiński in 1936, Hiller left the editorial staff of "Forma", where he had held the position of the first editor.
- <sup>54</sup> S. Themerson, [a recreation of the screen play for *Europa*], in: *Film as Film. Formal Experiment in Film, 1910-1975*, Hayward Gallery, London 1979, p. 89.
- <sup>55</sup> *Katalog Nowej Sztuki*, Wilno 1923.
- <sup>56</sup> M. Szczuka, *Pięć momentów filmu abstrakcyjnego*, "Blok" 1924, no. 1.
- <sup>57</sup> I have developed this argument in the book *Awangarda wobec kina. Film w kręgu polskiej awangardy artystycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 36, 37.

- <sup>58</sup> M. Szczuka, *Parę zasadniczych elementów filmu abstrakcyjnego*, "Blok" 1924, no. 8-9 (English translation in: *Film as Film...* op. cit., p. 88).
- <sup>59</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>60</sup> See note 44.
- <sup>61</sup> As early as 1922 Berlewi had published an article *Viking Eggeling i jego abstrakcyjno-dynamiczny film* ("Albatros" 1922, September, pp. 17-18; the text was written in Polish, but was published in the Yiddish translation). Reprinted in: M. Giżycki, *Walka o film artystyczny w międzywojennej Polsce*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 117-120.
- <sup>62</sup> BSM, *Henryk Berlewi*, wywiad, "Film" 1958, no. 33, p. 10.
- <sup>63</sup> Later known in France as Charles Ford.
- <sup>64</sup> K. Ford, *Poezja ekranu*, "Kino dla wszystkich" 1928, no. 61, p. 7. This refers of course to the film *Metropolis* (1927) by Fritz Lang, with the screenplay by him and Thea von Harbou.
- <sup>65</sup> J. Kurek, *Objaśniam "Or"*, "Linia" 1935, no. 5, p. 118.
- <sup>66</sup> I had my conversation with Kurek on 11.02.1983.
- <sup>67</sup> In 1985, Ignacy Szczepański reconstructed the film on the basis of the script by Marcin Giżycki and included it in his documentary film *Jalu Kurek* (1985). This reconstructed version was later shown separately during numerous reviews of the Polish avant-garde cinema.
- <sup>68</sup> J. Kurek, op. cit.
- <sup>69</sup> In the article *Kino – zwycięstwo naszych oczu. Rzecz o estetyce filmu* ("Głos Narodu" 22.03.1926, p. 2), Kurek wrote: *Film is optical poetry. (...) External action (so-called "content") is irrelevant in film. The essence of film is images, or rather the relationship, rhythm and succession of images. If there is a content-like action, story-based – it must be simple and uncomplicated.*
- <sup>70</sup> J. Kurek, *Objaśniam "Or"*, op. cit.
- <sup>71</sup> J. Kurek, *Nogi dziewczęce (Polska awangarda filmowa)*, "Światowid" 1933, no. 26, p. 20.
- <sup>72</sup> J. Kurek, *Objaśniam "Or"*, op. cit.
- <sup>73</sup> A. J., *Film szuka nowych dróg*, "As" 1937, p. 14.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>75</sup> A. L., „*Beton*”, *Nowy film krótkometrażowy*, "Światowid" 1933, no. 50, p. 16.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>77</sup> Z. Grotowski, *...ale ludzie nie są z betonu*, "Awangarda" 1934, no. 15, p. 5.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>81</sup> J. M. Brzeski, *Narodziny robota*, "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny", 1.01.1934, supplement "Kurier Literacko-Naukowy", p. XIV.
- <sup>82</sup> J. M. Brzeski, *Miasta – które czekają na swych reżyserów*, "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny", 29.11.1932, supplement "Kurier Filmowy", no. 48.
- <sup>83</sup> A. Turowski, *Konstrukttywizm polski*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków – Gdańsk – Łódź 1981, p. 120, note 11.
- <sup>84</sup> T. Żarnower, *Chęć zbadania niezbadanego...* in: *Katalog Wystawy Nowej Sztuki...* op. cit., p. 22.
- <sup>85</sup> In Polish: "tanizują". This term is a neologism created by the cited author. It comes, we can guess, from the adjective "tani" ("cheap") and means "cheapening" (meaning "vulgarizing", "reducing the value").
- <sup>86</sup> D. Vogel, *Genealogia fotomontażu i jego możliwości*, "Sygnały" 1934, no. 12-13.

# Between Nostalgia and Melancholy

Video performance *From My Window*  
by Józef Robakowski – an attempt at reconstruction  
and analysis

JACEK ŚWIDZIŃSKI

During the years 1978-1999, from his flat on the ninth floor of 19 Adam Mickiewicz Street in Łódź, Józef Robakowski recorded the view from his window. The apartment building is 20 stories high, and stands in the city centre alongside several other such towers, forming a skyscraper complex called “The Manhattan of Łódź”. In his flat – a vantage point – the artist, together with Małgorzata Potocka, founded the Exchange Gallery (of artistic thought) <sup>1</sup>, where up until today he still collects artefacts exchanged (by the method of “something for something”) with artists worldwide. Robakowski began filming from his apartment using a 16mm camera, which he then replaced with a video camera. In 1999, using the material recorded over the period of twenty-one years, he made a 19 minute *video/film* <sup>2</sup> called *From My Window*. The film, enhanced by a personal commentary, records the daily activities in the concrete public square adjacent to his block, mostly showing residents of the skyscraper and selected events of interest to the narrator. At the beginning of the film a “voice” is introduced as Józef Robakowski. In this manner, the artist recorded changes occurring over many years in the fragment of space defined by not only the window, but also by himself – a man with a camera.

It is unclear how Robakowski’s film should be classified. It is at least partly defined by the context in which it operates, as it is shown in art galleries as part of exhibitions and artistic events. Meanwhile, a similarly made picture by Krzysztof Kieślowski *Talking Heads* (1980) is usually screened on television in recurring cycles of major Polish documentary films. It seems that circulation – external to the works themselves – performatively assigns these films to specific categories. But what makes the film *From My Window* more suitable for screening in contemporary art galleries, rather than within TV series such as *Time for a Documentary*? Can it be called a documentary film?

Mirosław Przylipiak refers to the formula of André Bazin, according to whom *a documentary film gives pictures a logical structure of a discourse, and the discourse provides credibility and photographic evidence* <sup>3</sup>. After analysing Krzysztof Kieślowski’s text on the subject, Przylipiak adds that the discursive organisation of the medium cannot solely rely on the rearrangement and composition, but *on such an arrangement, which can fulfil discursive functions, to be a voice in the discussion, a statement* <sup>4</sup>. The film *From My Window*, despite its evident structure, cannot be included in these categories, because it does not incite the viewer to take

position. Following this trail, and considering the film as an intentional statement, we come to the question of its author.

Since the 1960s, Józef Robakowski has co-founded a number of avant-garde artistic groups: Oko (Eye), Zero-61 (later Zero-69), STKF Pętla (Loop), Krąg (Circle), Kultura Zrzuty, the international Infermental, and the famous Workshop of the Film Form, established in 1970 in Łódź Film School (with such members as Wojciech Bruszewski, Paweł Kwiek, Andrzej Różycki, Zbigniew Rybczyński, Ryszard Waśko)<sup>5</sup>. The group's manifesto states: *The Workshop explores and has ambitions to extend the possibilities of audiovisual arts, on the basis of current trends in contemporary art*<sup>6</sup>. It was there, that the first set of films (*of experimental, non-commercial nature*) shown at (...) numerous reviews in Poland was produced<sup>7</sup>. *The origin of the Workshop's thought processes come (...) from a reflection on the experiences of conceptual art, with its self-searching attitude in relation to its language*<sup>8</sup>. Robakowski is one of the artists who pioneered video art in Poland<sup>9</sup>. Because the film *From My Window* has, in Robakowski's view, *the nature of an ongoing physical phenomenon – as it interferes with the imagined reality*<sup>10</sup>, it can be perceived as an experimental video performance<sup>11</sup>.

The situation of an artist enjoying looking at people, who are unaware of his gaze, is like the position of an observer-analyst. The height and angle of vision make Robakowski similar to a scientist conducting an experiment on creatures shut up in a maze, in order to satisfy his curiosity. The film may be prompted by the need to rise above the social stage, looking at it not from the frontal and participatory perspective, but from the critic's box. This film might also be inspired by the desire to record and illustrate changes in the video sphere of a particular place at a specific time. But the most interesting and experimental aspect of the whole process, whose end result is the film *From My Window*, is the internal split between the nature of the activities used to create the footage, and its ultimate use.

The extremely long period of filming, during which the author had different plans and needs according to which the film was produced, and the final consistency of the footage finished at a specific point in time, make the film *From My Window* appear as two different works of art. One is the audiovisual picture screened in art galleries, with its various content and meanings, whilst the other can be read retrospectively. In the latter perspective, the film is the only remaining evidence of an experimental performance lasting twenty-one years. I will try to reconstruct the conceptual situation of this correlation, which is Robakowski's performance, genetically incorporated in the form of the *From My Window* film.

The performer, looking out of the apartment window in the skyscraper is frequently stripped of power over his own gaze, which is established through mediation between the fixed frame and the observer's dynamic conscience. It seems this position affects the specific, fragmentary view of the world that results from the individual montage. In the full shot, moving objects appear and disappear in the static environment of "what's behind the window". The fragmentary nature of this reality creates tension between what the viewer knows, and what he suspects on the basis of probability, as well as what he has invented about it. The window acts as a medium, which, if allowed to possess a gaze, can create a particular narrative. This gaze may lead to our inclusion in the thought processes of a recording and objective apparatus. But before the camera man is caught up in this game of

looks, he must approach the window, and what attracts him in the first place is the sound.

Ewa Rewers commented on the relation to the urban reality analysed by Henri Lefebvre in his essay *Vue de la fenêtre: Through the window (...) and into the room bursts an aggressive, polyrhythmic, and simultaneous reduced to the present time symphony of voices and signs manifesting the city, and its routine and social organization. Urban rhythms disrupt without invitation the inner rhythms of the experiencing body, forming with it an undivided, disturbing whole (...)*<sup>12</sup>. The window glass mediates between these spaces, filtering strange sounds to the human body, attracting his attention and his eye, which together project the individual's reality as arranged by him towards the outside world. The structure of man's relationship with the window – like any other – is created by *the collaboration of all the senses: sight, hearing, touch, etc., the diverse, but integrated sensorium*<sup>13</sup>.

Capturing on film the relationship between the outside world and the whole array of senses of a man and his camera is one of the main themes of Robakowski's video production<sup>14</sup>. Probably because no film is able to accurately reproduce the body's reactions to unexpected and provoked stimuli, the artist sometimes calls his recordings *video performance*. He thus uncovers its aspect of happening in time – as an action, in which the camera serves not only as a recording machine, but also as a deeply symbolic prop.

Józef Robakowski also made video art using a 16mm camera. When considering this classification type, the way the equipment is used is more important than its technical parameters. The camcorder allows for a rapid, mobile and long recording, akin to jotting down new ideas in a notebook. According to everyday social reality, its use is of a personal, even intimate, nature, which of course does not preclude a more or less specific viewer. It recalls a quick sketch, unlike the film camera, which is turned on mostly after a team was completed, whose recording is made specifically for an audience. Video enables individual experiments with reality, with the very fabric of the film, with the gaze, which when it materialises, strengthens the position of the viewer. It is as if the space beyond the frame of the recorded image is not first and foremost an extension of a view of the world, of which we can see excerpts on the screen, but of the human body holding the camera. As a prop, it is a mask of ourselves, which we can apply to our eternally unsure and mobile faces – a weapon that strengthens the power of subjectivity. From this symbolic angle, the most interesting and significant gesture made by Józef Robakowski during his performance, years later used in the film *From my Window*, was the very act of putting the video camera to the window pane.

Writing about the film *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock, Slavoj Žižek compared Jeff, played by James Stewart, to the observer who sits in the central tower of Jeremy Bentham's inverted Panopticon. Whilst people who ignore his gaze are free from the power of *all-pervasive eye*<sup>15</sup>, it is in fact the onlooker *who is terrorized, constantly looking out of the window, anxious not to miss some crucial detail*<sup>16</sup>. Precisely in this situation, in which the pedestrians do not even know that the observer is at the window on the ninth floor, the grip of outside reality becomes even more compelling. Looking at people becomes addictive, even though one is totally ignored by them. It was in fact in a situation of this kind that Józef Robakowski increased his strength, placing the video camera against the window.

This was not just a gesture of resistance, but a declaration of war – a performative act of opposition against an authority. The apparatus that had been used as a prop to reinforce subjectivity and to create the previously described “window installation” was no longer just a registering machine, but on the contrary – a projecting one.

In an interview, the artist recalled: *In the 1940s, my aunt owned a cinema in Gdynia; I had a private box there; projection room workers gave me some tape cuttings, and I constructed makeshift projectors. You could say that I grew up in the cinema* <sup>17</sup>. The young Robakowski was fascinated by movie projectors. In 1974, at the International Experimental Film Festival, in the Belgian town of Knokke-Heist, already a mature artist, he projected a film in which he cut out different size holes in the tape, letting in the light. During the show, the artist stood in front of the cinema screen, holding a mirror, thus transferring the dazzling images to the audience, who in return responded with camera flashes <sup>18</sup>. In this game of multiplied flashes and ray bursts, light served as a vehicle for the artist’s creative expression being projected onto the audience, who were included in his work of art, and portrayed on his own terms, as if directed. Art, including film making, is for Robakowski not so much the recording of reality, as projecting and changing it. In his struggle against the compelling need to gaze at people from the window, the performer uses a video camera in the same way. By applying his lens to the glass pane, he has joined together two transmitters – the camera and the window – forming them in his own hands. As the subject holding the camera, he controls them and can freely project his own vision, and include the observed people, who have caught his eye. At the moment of pointing his camcorder at them, he gives them life.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, through creating a world of men out of the concrete square, the filmmaker projects his own, often secret, characteristics, feelings and desires <sup>19</sup>. At the moment of contact between the camera and the window, he stages his own personality, and by recording his own “self” projected onto reality, he recorded a trace of his own self. It is no accident that Józef Robakowski began filming from his flat in the same year that he founded the Exchange Gallery. By filming people from his gallery window, he drew them into his web of looks, and made them part of the exhibition. The photographic material gathered for the film *From My Window* is a twenty-one year long collection of images which should be interpreted *in terms of representation, and this, according to Michał Paweł Markowski, can only be described as representing something in its absence, or “instead of” it* <sup>20</sup>. But if the people from Robakowski’s collection are predominantly a projection of his own self, then the subjectivity of the author, which should be strengthened by the power of the camcorder, paradoxically begins to melt, weaken and disappear.

*In rearranging the collection (...) the pleasure of manipulating objects (...) displaces the previous experience of uncertainty and loss (...). In both cases – the enjoyment and the act of collecting – the object becomes an instrument of security and a barrier, beyond which anxiety disappears* <sup>21</sup>. In the case of the specific collection of images and people which is later incorporated into the film *From My Window*, the process of its creation is simultaneously a security device for the maker and the source of the experience of uncertainty, loss and fear from which it has to protect him. This long-term experiment by Robakowski relies on a complex phenomenon of creative melancholy. The artist explores the inevitability of the passage

of time, which over many years become visible in the form of changes in the space outside his window. At the time of capturing the pictures, their outcome is uncertain. Paradoxically, this theoretical “infinity” only increases the imprisonment within a moment of time. Embarking on such an endless project, one is constantly further and further from its beginning, as the initial recording disappears under a pile of subsequent tapes depicting the passage of time. Each new cartridge and tape brings this “open-ended” project closer to its inevitable conclusion. That which is alive is arrested in the form of a standstill, replayable image by the camera. What was captured on film is forever dying. The essence of recording is loss. The rhythmic switching on and off of the camera over the years, recording the rhythm of continuous pacing to and fro, recalls the tragic, horrifying, and absurd punishment of Sisyphus, who endlessly traversed the same path. The essence of melancholy exists precisely in cycles of such obsessive repetition, linked to our inability to accept the losses that result from our very existence in time<sup>22</sup>.

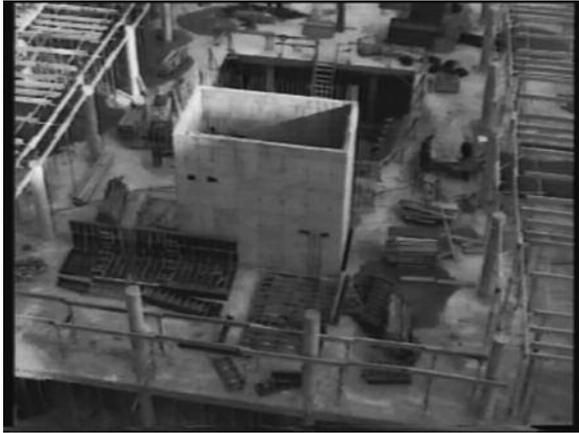
Robakowski’s projections from the window of his apartment-gallery record random passers-by as “quotations”. *A quotation*, according to Marek Bieńczyk, *is a sign of living in between, as in one of the basic states of melancholy, which [Søren] Kierkegaard calls the alternative – living in the gap between the despair of not being others and the inability to be oneself. It also involves an implicit denial of self, which can only be restored with the oblique work of borrowing*<sup>23</sup>. In the visual arts, the mechanical recording of a man’s image draws his likeness into the narrative of your own meaningful, subjective gaze. Robakowski’s recording relies entirely on such borrowings. This melancholic quoting, collecting and repeating *always hides a spurting wound*<sup>24</sup> – the wound being life, which most of the time is dying. This painful flaw might take the form of city sounds, about which I wrote – the changing rhythms heard through the window. This noise is the real, chaotic rhythm of life, a rushing stream which – continuing Henri Bergson’s metaphor – always leads to the mouth of the river, and submergence in oblivion. If we conceive the subject to be the man trapped in an apartment, then the melancholic wound is the open window. *Time is the big window of the world, and windows are small streams of time which flow in and out of the world. A man standing in front of a window is facing time*<sup>25</sup>. Facing the future is extremely difficult for the melancholic person, who cannot come to terms with loss, and when walking, takes more steps backward than forward. I believe that the reason for applying the camcorder to the window, was to stop time and try to take control. The film *From My Window* was stripped of sound. This act of muting the rhythms penetrating through the window evokes the sterilisation of a laboratory. This melancholic laboratory serves as the lone scientist’s study, in which he examines his own malignant wound, records its changes, tries different medications, and is equally frightened and fascinated by it. Robakowski observes “life” from his window in the same way as the “life” of a festering wound is observed in a laboratory. The words “to look at” and “dressing” (as in “dressing the wound”) in the Polish language share a common root („patrzeć” and „opatrunek”)<sup>26</sup>.

These are just a few of the possible reconstructions and interpretations of this play of attitudes, needs and meanings, that emerge on a symbolic level as a result of the artist’s arrangement of the long-term interactions between the body, consciousness and media forms, within a specific time and place. This performance

provided Robakowski with tapes, which he assembled in 1999 to form the film *From My Window*. This film is surprisingly different in nature compared with the artist's original melancholic gesture, repeated over a period of twenty-one years. Rather, this is nostalgic work, which focuses on displaying the "life" of the square, and in particular its fauna – the people whom the maker of the film knows. Each individual is briefly described by the narrator – Robakowski – sometimes very laconically: name – occupation – floor on which he lives, at other times more personally, when he recounts his own relationship with the person, or some of their common history. This is a way of showcasing the architectural, aesthetic, political and social changes that affect a fragment of the urban landscape, shaping (and coming from) the people involved. Over the years, Józef Robakowski has a consistent attitude towards all of them – he "likes" them. He likes them as a whole, as a relatively homogeneous part of his memory.

The narrator reacts to the images as they crop up, like a witness participating in these events, but occasionally he reveals excess knowledge of the future, thus exposing his authorial position. Already, in the first words of the introduction, he reveals that this story told in 1999 is retrospective. Robakowski's film depicts a tale created according to the principle defined by Siegfried Kracauer, as a "found thread" emerging from reality. In his reflections on the nature of documentary, the author of *Theory of Film* believes that some structures belong to reality itself; it is enough to record this reality on film, in order to automatically capture its structure<sup>27</sup>. *From My Window* displays the history of the concrete square in four phases of its planning and use, which simultaneously reflect the various processes of socio-political transformation in Poland.

At the beginning of the film, in 1978, the square is part of a larger space lined with concrete slabs, which separates the artist's block from Mickiewicz Street. It was probably put to use in this form after the completion of the entire estate. The character of this undeveloped space changes, depending on its current function and use. Robakowski's approach recalls the anthropological method, as postulated by Florian Znaniecki, of researching objects and cultural facts by taking into account their humanistic coefficient, and revealing the given phenomenon within a dense network of individual activities and experiences, which provide it with a variety of meanings<sup>28</sup>. The square is simultaneously a place where people stroll, and a toilet area for their dogs. It is both a children's playground, and a car park; it is a sports arena for the racer, and where Catholics take their Sunday walk to church; the daily way to and from work for the residents of the block and the caretaker's workplace. For Robakowski, however, it is the scene of all of these activities. Perhaps the square's lack of clear function was the reason for its transformation in 1983 – based on Colonel Michalski's decision – into a city car park. From that point on, the area, crowded with coaches from across Poland, which stopped on account of the nearby grocery store, ceased to be a space of free expression, which had been perceived by the authorities under martial law as potentially dangerous. Seven years later, after the fall of communism in 1991, the square was still a parking space, but of a different kind – a private car park for the estate's residents. For Robakowski, it became a place where one displayed newly-acquired luxury goods such as expensive cars, whilst people walking their dogs had to move onto a narrow pavement. With time, every exhibition space ceases to be a place of expression. In 1999, the



*From My Window*, dir. Józef Robakowski (1999)

area was definitively developed according to the spirit of capitalism – construction of a five-star foreign hotel began, and was erected in this spot. Thus ended the life of the concrete square, absorbed by history.

In the film, time was constructed in a linear fashion. The square had its beginnings (the undeveloped phase), its life (or rather its struggle for life), and its end. A structure developed from the reality, shaped at the moment of each conscious turning on of the camera in the hands of the editor, and in the mind of the film's spectator, who "pieces together" each shot. Slavoj Žižek wrote: *the experience of a linear "organic" flow of events is an illusion (albeit a necessary one) that masks the fact that it is the ending that "retroactively" confers the consistency of an organic whole on the preceding events. What is masked is the radical contingency of the enchainment of narration, the fact that, at every point, things might have turned out otherwise*<sup>29</sup>. The resulting thread is developed rather than found in the material of reality. The chaotically variable sound attracting us to the window is the vibration of real life – a mixture of rhythm and coincidence, which escapes the structural organisation of the conscious self, the latter ultimately always being based on the structure of language. Precisely because, according to Ewa Rewers, *the rhythm of the city is not identical to the rhythm of language*<sup>30</sup>, in order to give his cinematic material a linear order and a logical sequence of events, Józef Robakowski muted the sounds of the busy street, often left just outside of the frame. In the end, he adds a verbal narrative to this silent material, re-identifying the rhythm of the city with the rhythm of language, essentially "an intervention on reality"<sup>31</sup>.

This interrupting voice structures events: it decides what is important at that time, predicts what will happen in future, and focuses the viewer's attention on a particular thread. This is a key operation in the process of creating a logical, diegetic reality, inscribed in the model of cause and effect. The narrator's distance in time, which allows them to find a 'thread', harmonizes with distance created by the photo format used, with these photos often not of the best quality, and taken from the ninth floor using a 16mm camera or a video camera. The narrator adopts a position greater than that of an ordinary witness of events, thereby creating an impression of distance, not just in the structural and temporal sense, but also quantitatively. This perspective may be that of a nostalgic collective memory.

According to Svetlana Boym, in Eastern Europe, as a result of the ever-recurring political transformations that involve breaking with the past of social groups and entire nations, *nostalgia became a defence mechanism against the accelerated rhythm of change and the economic shock therapy*<sup>32</sup>, as well as an expression of *yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world*<sup>33</sup>. *Nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory*<sup>34</sup>, and just as the position of the narrator in *From My Window*, it *relies on temporal and spatial distance (...)*<sup>35</sup>. According to Lynn Spigel, it is in fact nostalgia which is one of the reasons that history is reduced to a linear sequence of events<sup>36</sup>.

The creation of a common heritage for a group is based on emotional memories associated with specific recollections. Nostalgia is like a drawer full of items from one's past which are equally important to a larger group, established precisely because of this shared empathy. It is *a small piece of indivisible space, a scrap of life impossible to explain, an experience of living together in a particular country, in*

*a particular culture and system, in a specific historical moment (...), the sympathetic territory of a community created by a group of people*<sup>37</sup>. In the film *From My Window*, the narrator says that there is nothing left to film after 1991. However, as the voice was added eight years later, it is not that there was nothing to film, but rather nothing to remember. At some point the narrator declares that he does not remember anything from the 1990s, except one big blizzard. At the same time, the stories of the communist era, which are much more numerous, illustrate certain characters and experiences from the collective and nostalgic memory of the period. The first figure in the film is Jan Nargut, the owner of a black dog called Negro – an inhabitant of mass imagination. Following the change of regime, and the death of Negro, he has a new, equally black, dog, but now more “politically correct” and known as Azorek. Additionally, at the beginning of the film, a typical character appears – *an ordinary Jasio, as found in any other block of flats, who for a few pennies will help the residents*. There is also the secretive Mr. Z. – *supplier of illegal meat to his neighbours*; a rally driver pictured in his large Fiat, who shows off his driving skills on the fresh snow; the wife of the artist himself, who starts queuing at a store but gives up, and is spied upon by a mysterious camouflaged car belonging to the Authorities. Moreover, also included are: the May Day street parades, which particularly interested the artist in 1999; the collective return of the state employees, always at 4.30 pm; and the director of a meat packing plant, forced into early retirement for fraud.

Robakowski’s work in its final form is marked by a rupture, a rift between nostalgia and melancholy. Both of these evocative psychological states, associated with experiencing time, and often used as narrative strategies, construct specific situations and visions of reality based not only on different, but in many cases on exactly opposing, foundations. When filming the footage, the artist was immersed in reality, elements of which only years later became objects of nostalgia. When making the recording, he could not predict the ending of the film; the longing for the square only came after its loss, as a result of the distance required for nostalgia to develop. The real action in time – Robakowski’s performance – is akin to a melancholic interest in loss, the gaping hole formed between the “self” and time (or the video camera and window), an obsessive staring at and experimenting with it. Melancholy is an individual’s yearning following an unconscious and inexpressible loss, related to our temporal existence, and inscribed in the fundamental trauma of the beginning and end. Nostalgia, on the other hand, is the collective memory of concrete, material experiences which unify a group, relived at a temporal and often also spatial distance. Nostalgia is the creation of a superficial narrative that cloaks time, typical, easily recognizable and almost decorative, filling the gaping void of melancholy with memories. It is the contextualisation of the non-contextual, an absorption of traumatic contexts. Melancholy is the festering wound – nostalgia is its dressing.

The silent picture *From My Window* is a depressing tale of individual evanescence, the immortalisation of twenty-one years of nothingness that is already non-existent. The voice-over in the film tells a detached, ironic story consisting of a number of experiences drawn from the mythology of the late communist and early Third Polish Republic. The subject of these stories differs: individual and enclosed in its own world, and open and drawing on the collective imagination. What position does the viewer hold in the face of such an internally divided work?



*From My Window*, dir. Józef Robakowski (1999)

The works of Robakowski are firmly underpinned by the theoretical texts he writes. Theories, especially manifestos, are an integral part of the oeuvre of Robakowski – the conceptualist, performer and avant-garde artist. In conversation with Bogusław Zmudziński, he once said:

B. Z.: (...) *through medias you want to access reality, and also to submit to its influence, but there are times when subjectivity takes over, and pure creation comes to surface...*

J. R.: *These are moments I call “misappropriations”; they offer a great opportunity to art. It is often useful to perform such 180-degrees volte-faces, to enter into something fixed and accepted, in order to later perform yet another intervention. I love it, it feels great.*

– *Am I right to think that the commentary to your film “From My Window”, which as you said, is a fairy tale, pure fiction, is an example of such an U-turn, a creative interpretation imposed on reality?*

– *Yes, it is exactly such an operation. These creative ideas are opportunities to reach deeper into this relation, this structure. I am open to what reality brings, but at the same time I'm ready for mischief, which I do to it in return. This is a sort of game, a play between the subjective and the objective* <sup>38</sup>.

This statement allows us to juxtapose the film *From My Window* with the famous manifesto by Robakowski, *I manipulate!* in 1988, which contains the following: *I firmly declare that throughout the life of my art I feed on manipulation, which is used to confuse the clear personal image. I am convinced that the artist is a kind of treacherous fraud, a social ulcer, whose vitality is in fact based on manipulation for his own benefit, as an expression of self-defence from annihilation, i.e. public acceptance and appreciation* <sup>39</sup>.

Even the viewer who is not acquainted with this manifesto may be suspicious of stories in the film. The large numbers of freely quoted facts from several decades ago, as well as unusual names used such as Wood, Rye, Important, Fresh, Puff, Starling, Fish, may raise doubts as to their authenticity. Robakowski does not let the recorded people introduce themselves (in contrast to Krzysztof Kieślowski in *Talking Heads*) – he does it for them, and states who they are for him. Clearly, it is he who gives meaning and drama to the cinematic material. The inferior quality of the



*From My Window*, dir. Józef Robakowski (1999)

recording, the camera angle and the distance deprive the captured people of their faces, take away their individuality, and make them ideal material for manipulation. The same man recorded in different situations may be introduced by the voice as several different people, and this very man, were he to watch the film, might not be aware of this. Moreover, the filmmaker himself makes clear to the viewer his own omnipotence and the potential at all times for manipulation, when at the start of the film he mentions a passer-by – firstly focusing the audience’s attention on him – to announce after a short while that he does not know him and is not interested. In 1999, Robakowski made his most radical cut of the twenty-one years: he used the accumulated material as an illustration for a story he had invented.

This is the most performative end to the long-standing video performance. I think that with this performative act he has established a concrete reality, using the whole length of the film, together with the history of its making. He created a world of lies, theft and manipulation – this space containing the sole truth of reality. Manipulation is the main strategy of consciousness, perception and memory, man’s way of communicating with reality. Applying fiction to recorded events is a way of controlling the world.

The human mind and its subjectivity are identifiable in the crack that is always visible in Robakowski’s work. This is an area of the eternal in-between, the infinite “and” – an enumeration, instead of “or” – a decisive choice. An existence between “me” and “not-me”, between living in time and its end, between life and death, between nostalgia and melancholy. Subjectivity is the fluid spot between the two pieces of glass – the video camera lens and the window. By applying one to the other, Robakowski is looking at this “dot” as a scientist at a microscopic preparation – the tissue trapped between two glass slides, not belonging to either of them, foreign, but creating a relationship between the two by the mere fact of its existence. The history of all the action and material for the film *From My Window* is a replication and analysis of the human mind and the human condition set in time. It follows Robakowski’s call that in art *he deals with the study of his own consciousness, revealing it through mechanical records* <sup>40</sup>. The video performance created between 1978 and 1999 is an analysis of this perception of living in time and in relation to history, as well as of the contradictions and associated processes and recesses of memory.

Robakowski's superimposition of the completed nostalgic film over the material created during his melancholic performance, repeats the human mind's process of retroactive ordering of the past into a sequence of events more realistic than reality. In the memoir which is *From My Window*, he reveals three types of memory, characterised by Ewa Rewers as political, intellectual and popular. *The first one is primarily engaged in assigning importance to events treated instrumentally, in establishing their short-lived hierarchies, and subordinating them to cultural canons. (...) The intellectual memory, on the contrary, is based on a dynamic model of rationality and self-reflection, and does not like simple solutions. Often, it shies away from single meanings, and, betraying an intolerable tendency to deep thinking, never considers events as ready and finished. (...) Popular memory, on the contrary, is willing to duplicate someone else's patterns; mimicking others (...), it brings us closer to a habit*<sup>41</sup>. The political memory in the film is the state-owned official memory, the layers of the urban palimpsest, and the main object of the "found" thread in the film – the institutional transformations of the square. The intellectual memory is the self-reflection of the performer standing with his camera by the window, never closed, trying to capture the structure of reality in all its complex relationships. The popular memory, on the other hand, is the nostalgic narrative created in 1999, drawing on the spectrum of cultural clichés and favouring oblivion rather than reflection. The act of revealing their associations, hierarchies, consequences and oppositions, reconstructs the process of building a vision of the past, as created by the various systems of these three inseparable kinds of memory. It is the fundamental heterogeneity of this structure, replicated by *From My Window*, which causes problems with its classification – the hyper document – as a story created exclusively in the mind of the director, rearranging the "non-fiction" film material<sup>42</sup>, and at the same time as a conceptual and experimental film (again "and", instead of "or"). The work based on manipulation, on the theft of human identity and its liberal use – on "quoting" within the created reality – the simultaneous *projection towards the Other, and the Theft, in the Promethean sense of the term*<sup>43</sup>, is a strictly realistic creation. *Realism – wrote [Roland] Barthes – "is not so much copying reality, as copying (the depicted) copy of reality". Looking at the world – says Barthes – immediately we "frame" it, creating its representation. Watching the image, we create a representation of a representation, which reality escapes. Thus realism is not "copying" reality, but parodying it, building fiction on first degree fiction, which is our looking*<sup>44</sup>. Józef Robakowski not only reveals this hoax of mediations, but forces the viewer to make his own interpretation of its individual layers. Both by writing the manifesto *I Manipulate!*, and by suggesting manipulation in the content and form of the film, the artist creates in the viewer a distancing filter – he gives him glasses with which to read reality as something created by ourselves whilst reading others. As a viewer, I do not know at which point the filmmaker tells or shows a lie. I do not even know whether he does it at all, because within his lies, he can use true facts; when stating that he manipulates, what he says, is true. My general perception of the film is underpinned by this lack of confidence in the author.

Robakowski forces us to adopt a stance similar to the semiology of Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* – a penetrating analysis of *the functioning of social clichés in popular culture*<sup>45</sup>. The author of *From My Window* said that in his video art *he meant to exclude people from political and social manipulation. (...) This is just as*

*relevant in a capitalist society as the press, television or cinema are suggestive instruments that simply dictate human behaviour, thinking and functioning. How to respond to this? How to react to this kind of manipulation? By a deep awareness that this manipulation exists. The artist works in a somewhat different way, by persuading people of his own existence. This is also a form of manipulation, except that it has a different meaning and a different aim. It has to make people aware that they are being manipulated*<sup>46</sup>.

At one point, immediately after the political transformation, when the narrator talks about the renaming of the street on which his house stands, from Adam Mickiewicz to Józef Piłsudski, all of a sudden and for a couple of seconds, we see the only shot that does not show the view from the window – but a painted portrait of Józef Piłsudski. The thoughtful face of the Marshal belongs to a mythical reality, according to Barthes' understanding. This crisscrossing of time (the window) and myth (the portrait), is the result of yet another one of consciousness' mechanisms, but the eyes that stare primarily straight at the audience for two seconds demand interpretation. This change is a manipulation within myths – signs with an ideological added extra. The change of the street's name, inscribed onto the floating map of the world of signs, has no logic in the broader context of systemic transformations. There is only the emptiness of chaos – a lack, inherent in the very essence of the sign – a lack of significant connection with what is being marked. Robakowski draws our attention to the mechanisms of ideological manipulation, while at the same time indicating its detachment from the real world.

This surprise which comes from outside the film's reality is akin to suddenly entering a short but dark tunnel during a train journey on a sunny day – *it breaks the links in the chain of cause and effect*<sup>47</sup>. It is like finding oneself in the space "in between", which not so much darkens the sight, but opens our eyes wide to the all-encompassing, black, blank emptiness disguised in each look.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Robakowski, *Żywa galeria*, Łódź 1995-1997, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).

<sup>2</sup> This term was used in the film's credits.

<sup>3</sup> M. Przyłipiak, *Film dokumentalny jako gatunek retoryczny*, „Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1998, no. 23, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> J. Robakowski, *Żywa galeria*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> J. Robakowski, *Moje multimedialne peregrynacje... + 5 obrazów i kilka autodygresji*, in: *Odwaga patrzenia. Eseje o fotografii*, Łódź 2006, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).

<sup>7</sup> J. Robakowski, *Żywa galeria*, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> A. Kępińska, *Nowa sztuka. Sztuka polska w latach 1945-1978*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 247-249.

<sup>9</sup> M. Wasilewski, *Sztuka nieobecna*, Poznań 1999, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> J. Robakowski, *Video Art – szansa podejścia rzeczywistości*, in: *Video Art*, Lublin 1976, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).

<sup>11</sup> This term is sometimes used by the artist when referring to his films; compare: J. Robakowski, *Sztuka do bólu...* <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).

<sup>12</sup> E. Rewers, *Post-polis. Wstęp do filozofii nowoczesnego miasta*, Kraków 2005, pp. 66-67.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> B. Kowalska, *Z rozważań o nowej roli ciała w sztuce*, in: Yearbook “Rzeźba Polska” 1992-1993, vol. 6: *Ciało i sztuczność*, Wydawnictwo Centrum Rzeźby Polskiej w Orońsku, Orońsko 1997, p. 28.

- <sup>15</sup> S. Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, Cambridge 1991, p. 92.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Robakowski, *Odautorskie szczypanie rzeczywistości*, in conversation with Marta Skłodowska, "Gazeta Wyborcza Łódź" 26.02.2007, <http://www.teatry.art.pl/!rozmowy/osrz.htm> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>18</sup> J. Robakowski, *Instalacje*, Łódź 1998, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>19</sup> J. Laplanche, J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, transl. D. Nicholson-Smith, London 1998, pp. 352-354.
- <sup>20</sup> M. P. Markowski, *Perekreacja*, in: G. Percec, *Gabinet kolekcjonera*, transl. M. P. Markowski, Warszawa 2003, pp. 158-159.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 158.
- <sup>22</sup> Compare, among others: B. Banasiak, *Słońce ekstazy, noc melancholii. Rzecz o Raymondzie Rousselu*, Łódź – Wrocław 2007, pp. 76-78; M. Bieńczyk, *Melancholia. O tych, co nigdy nie odnajdą straty*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 39-40 and particularly pp. 55-61.
- <sup>23</sup> M. Bieńczyk, op. cit., p. 32.
- <sup>24</sup> M. P. Markowski, op. cit., p. 175.
- <sup>25</sup> S. Symotiuł, *Filozofia i genius loci*, Warszawa 1997, p. 56, cited by E. Rewers, *Post-polis...* op. cit., p. 62.
- <sup>26</sup> I. Malmor, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Warszawa – Bielsko-Biała 2010, p. 316.
- <sup>27</sup> M. Przyłipiak, op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>28</sup> F. Znaniecki, *Socjologia wychowania*, Warszawa 1973, p. 28.
- <sup>29</sup> S. Žižek, op. cit., p. 69.
- <sup>30</sup> E. Rewers, op. cit., p. 58.
- <sup>31</sup> *Thermograms – Operation on Reality*, is the title of Robakowski's text, in which the artist describes the strange, quasi-photographic objects he calls "thermograms". Compare: J. Robakowski, *Termogramy – operacja na rzeczywistości*, 1999, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>32</sup> S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001, p. 64.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. XIV.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. XVI.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem, p. 70.
- <sup>36</sup> L. Spiegel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*, Durham – London 2001, p. 372.
- <sup>37</sup> D. Ugrešić, *The Confiscation of Memory*, in: eadem, *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays*, transl. C. Hawkesworth, University Park 1998, here quoted after the Polish edition: *Konfiskata pamięci*, transl. D. J. Ćirić, in: *Nostalgia. Eseje o tęsknocie za komunizmem*, Wołowiec 2002, pp. 245-246.
- <sup>38</sup> J. Robakowski, *Kino jest dla mnie najpiękniejszą z instalacji*, in conversation with Bogusław Zmudziński, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>39</sup> J. Robakowski, *Manipuluje!* Warszawa 1988, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>40</sup> J. Robakowski, *Stan świadomości*, Łódź 1976, cited by J. Busza, *Iluminacje Robakowskiego*, in: *Wobec fotografii*, Warszawa 1983, <http://www.robakowski.net/> (accessed: 23.05.2010).
- <sup>41</sup> E. Rewers, op. cit., p. 182.
- <sup>42</sup> M. Przyłipiak, op. cit., p. 7.
- <sup>43</sup> G. Percec, *Gabinet kolekcjonera*, transl. M. P. Markowski, cited by M. P. Markowski, *Perekreacja*, op. cit., p. 173.
- <sup>44</sup> M. P. Markowski, op. cit., p. 151.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 85.
- <sup>46</sup> M. Wasilewski, op. cit., p. 65.
- <sup>47</sup> G. Królikiewicz, *Przestrzeń filmowa poza kadrem*, "Kino" 1972, no. 11, p. 27.

# Head of Medusa, or realism in films of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety

MARCIN MARON

We can hazard a guess that when considering post-war Polish film up till 1989, it was in the movement called the Cinema of Moral Anxiety <sup>1</sup> that realist tendencies, which earlier for various reasons had only appeared vestigially, were most strongly felt. It is here that the belief that cinema is an art of reality, which can show a true picture of the real world based on the observation of contemporary life, most clearly manifested itself. As a result, we can also say that this cinema inherited the main difficulties and limitations of realist art.

The category of realism causes considerable problems within the aesthetics of the twentieth century, and not only because of the multiple concepts of realism, and therefore the difficulty of strict definition. One of the reasons for these problems <sup>2</sup> is the mix of epistemology and axiology characteristic of realism, which can be seen at the root of most concepts. Generally speaking, this applies to two main and extreme claims of realism: the axiological postulate of the conceptualization of general truths (*realis* – true) and the cognitive anticipation of the most detailed possible depiction of reality (*realis* – real). As noted by Zofia Mitosek, *this mix of epistemology and axiology made realism in the second half of the twentieth century an indigestible dish* <sup>3</sup>.

Problems with realism also become apparent thanks to the heightened awareness in the twentieth century of how much the realist motivation is in fact subordinate to compositional and aesthetic motivations (and also, like it or not, ideological ones), thanks to which the illusion of reality is produced. Obviously in this context the problem of non-transparency of artistic languages also becomes important.

The troubles of realism did not spare film and reflection on cinema. Here, however, the belief in the special recording abilities of film, based on its photographic “bond” with reality, came to the rescue of the practice and theory of realism. This as it were ontological quality of film, together with the use of innovative cinematic techniques (mobile camera, shots on location, long shots, sound recorded on set) and various stylistic devices and conventions rooted in literature (e.g. the episodic character of a storyline) resulted in feature film movements after World War II which can be defined as realist (neorealism, the English Angry Young Men, the Czech new wave).

But the difficulties of realism in Polish post-1945 cinema were of yet another specific character. They were the result, to a large extent, of the socio-political situ-

ation. As noted by Tadeusz Miczka, they originated from the extreme ideologization of the postulates of realism that occurred in socialist realism, and the resulting artistic strategy (in many instances successful) based on an ability to *generate a specific tension between the conventions of film realism and the surplus of aesthetization and symbolism*<sup>4</sup>. These tensions naturally found their highest artistic expression in the films of the Polish School. According to Miczka, it was from this ambiguous (because strongly allusive) strategy that CMA originated. But it was precisely the creators of this movement, by adopting the program of *moral purification* – as pointed out by Miczka – who used the form of *extreme film realism*<sup>5</sup>. They also overcame the *reluctance towards photographic realism* found in Polish cinema<sup>6</sup>.

The phenomenon of realism can be explored with three main reference points in mind: as an author's strategy, as the property of a work, and as a set of expectations held by the public<sup>7</sup>. In the case of films classified as CMA, each of the three levels seems to be important. In fact this cinema created, with the help of particular cinematic methods, a specific code which had to reach the viewer in a defined historical time and social context.

Let us recall the voices of a few filmmakers from the period. In 1977, Krzysztof Kieślowski said in a newspaper interview: *In cinema I favour the propositions close to realism. Tradition does not really inspire me, more what my life is about, what surrounds us*<sup>8</sup>.

In 1978, Agnieszka Holland, still before her feature-length film debut, said this in a survey on the situation of young Polish cinema, conducted by the monthly periodical "Kino": *There appeared something like institutional (television used to prefer /.../ the realist contemporary film drama) and social demand (the audience for various reasons awaited this type of film). (...) Because we were all convinced that large areas of our life, even family life, had not yet been shown, it was necessary to show how people live, how they eat, how they talk, and what their work is like*<sup>9</sup>.

While years later (but still during the period of making of these films), Feliks Falk thus added to their common principles: *When journalism was silent, our films told the truth about reality, therefore fulfilled an extremely important function. They informed the public, or rather publicly stated what society knew, but which it had to keep quiet. Yet even then it was not our task to offer solutions*<sup>10</sup>.

Already these brief statements draw attention to two essential areas mentioned at the beginning, related to the perception of realism: epistemology and axiology. In other words – the most important objectives of CMA realism are: first, a description of reality consistent with the truth; second, a function of exposure and awareness related to *moral reflection*<sup>11</sup>.

Both objectives evidently referred to the reality of the second half of the 1970s, a time of sharply manifested economic downturn, social breakdown, workers' protests (in 1976 – leading to the rise of the opposition and the beginning of an independent culture), as well as a period in which mass culture had an increasing impact on society, so everything that Andrzej Friszke described as *the crisis of the new social contract*<sup>12</sup>. Andrzej Kijowski in 1977 bluntly characterized this period in the pages of his *Journal: The loss of prestige of the social and political activist. The loss of prestige of ideology. The decline in the value of words. The collapse of social values. A new version of the old individualism: cunning selfishness*<sup>13</sup>.

Of particular importance to filmmakers was the impact of the tenets of Young Culture, and later the work of poets who were part of the so-called new wave and their desire to describe and identify by artistic means *unrepresented reality*<sup>14</sup>. As Mariola Jankun-Dopart put it: *The authors of "The Unrepresented World" called for a realist novel, but found no response among writers. In this vacuum the young filmmakers arrived – and probably very consciously*<sup>15</sup>. *To exist, means to be described in a culture – the realist method had to serve as a description and the latter was to raise awareness, to help find oneself in a social situation, therefore to cognitively objectify it*<sup>16</sup>. This is how a film movement considered to be a message on social reality was born, with a characteristic hero (showing several variants) – the *man who saw through*<sup>17</sup>.

When we reflect on the realism of CMA films, this area of the artistic output seems essential, belonging as it does to the field of feature films made in the years 1976-1981, strictly *associated with the picture of the present*<sup>18</sup>, which Tadeusz Lubelski symbolically called *canonical*<sup>19</sup>. In the context of the problems mentioned above, we can reflect on the set of characteristics associated with the cinematic image in the works of the period. It would primarily deal with that element of *photographic realism*, in which the desire to describe reality most fully manifested itself, and which was obviously the result of authorial strategy and remained closely related to the reflection on the subject of this reality. As Mariola Jankun-Dopart noted, in many CMA films, just as in new wave poetry, *the aesthetic value of accurate description also reveals the ethical value, and the truth connects the two axiological fields*<sup>20</sup>. However, since the accuracy of this description also depended on the type of cinematic method used, it may prove interesting to look at the films of this movement in terms of visual and cinematographic strategies employed.

*Pairing of directors and cinematographers* – wrote Maria Kornatowska – *was often formed as early as college. They were linked by similar interests and artistic views, as well as by their dates of birth. In the first half of the 1970s, the filmmakers, cinematographers and actors born in the 1940s came to the fore, and in the second half, those born in the 1950s made their debut. The generational bond (encompassing roughly ten years) played a significant role in shaping the new cinema*<sup>21</sup>.

We can add that it was to a certain extent a continuation of the tradition of close cooperation between directors and cinematographers that had existed in earlier Polish cinema, and that there emerged a new generation of cinematographers of the "Polish School", many still active today. This was thus a continuation of sorts, albeit under new historical and working conditions, and with new aesthetic rules.

At one point, there was much criticism of the form of CMA films. The two key complaints typically relate to the oversimplified dramaturgy (and schematism of characters) and the aesthetics of the footage. In this context they were, however, as a rule limited to rather general, repetitive objections and comments. Tadeusz Miczka, for example, wrote about the *deliberate mediocrity of shots, which was supposed to reflect the mediocrity of life based on a crisis of values*<sup>22</sup>. These matters were discussed at greater length by Dobrochna Dabert in her extensive monograph on CMA. But except for the interesting proposal of a typology of "diegetic space" characteristic for the films of this movement<sup>23</sup>, the author writes little about methods of creating the "screen space", while observations on these issues refer only to

the influence of the documentary and the technical faults of the shots (e.g. fuzziness). In other cases, criticism was limited to similar observations<sup>24</sup>.

Thus important questions can arise. Is it right that the visual side of these films is deprecated? Is it true that, as regards the shots, each of the films reveals the same kind of form and style? How is “photographic realism” manifested in them, and how does it complement the director’s reflections? And finally, how (if at all) do the aesthetics dominant in them carry the difficulties and limitations typical of realism?

When discussing this subject, we must bear in mind the evolution of the phenomenon that was CMA. The beginning of the “canonical” period can be dated to 1975, with Krzysztof Kieślowski’s television film *Personel* (*Personnel*), and 1976, with the cinema films *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*) by Andrzej Wajda, and *Barwy ochronne* (*Camouflage*) by Krzysztof Zanussi. This period came after a wave of documentaries made at the turn of the 1960s, and more or less successful attempts in the first half of the 1970s to produce something of a “hybrid” film, inspired by documentaries and the aesthetics of the Czech new wave (films by Antoni Krauze, the brothers Janusz and Andrzej Kondratiuk, Marek Piwowski, but also the episodic film *Obrazki z życia* /*Pictures from Life*, 1979/<sup>25</sup>). The second important type of realizations directly preceding CMA were television films (of medium-length), shot by the majority of young film directors before their full-length debuts, and the episodic films made for television by the film unit “X” in 1975-1976 (*CDN*, 1975; *Zdjęcia próbne* /*Screen Tests*, 1976/; the TV series *Sytuacje rodzinne* /*Family Situations*, 1976-1977/; and the aforementioned *Pictures from Life*). We can already pick out two possible aesthetic models here: the documentary film, but also the aesthetics of the feature film adapted to the production and broadcasting needs of Polish Television (TVP). In 1978, Agnieszka Holland said this about the specificity of feature films made for television, based on her own experience: *The film made for television created a new quality in the public reception (...). All of this has specific implications. Some thematic areas (mainly the present time) and some styles (particularly the realist, perhaps even veristic, convention) can count on a large television audience (leaving aside the strictly entertaining productions). In general the viewer expects the reality shown in the TV film to be believable. (...) Contrary to appearances, the attractiveness of a storyline or the accuracy and originality of artistic expression do not play a particularly large role here. Fulfilling the audience’s expectations risks entering the shallows of small realism, or conventional journalism, but on the other hand creates opportunities for a dialogue on important current issues with a very broad range of spectators. (...) And so a television film has a better chance of reaching the audience when it is a “photograph of life”, and a smaller chance when it is a creation, composition, generalisation*<sup>26</sup>.

There were also other dangers that arose in connection with the production of television films, about which Kieślowski said in 1978: *I have the impression – to put it briefly – that the image of the world on television is always an official image, there is only one point of view, one perspective, and we already know the other pieces of the puzzle. We may be surprised by some fictional or artistic dénouement, never by a point of view*<sup>27</sup>.

However, the key films of the CMA movement usually demonstrate a much more complex form and content than earlier documentaries and TV films. Amongst the cinematographers who contributed to it, the achievements of three in particular

attract our attention: Sławomir Idziak, Edward Kłosiński and Jacek Petrycki. They shot the most important films of this period by Kieślowski, Wajda, Falk and Holland. The input of Krzysztof Wyszyński, the permanent collaborator of Janusz Kijowski, into the movement was also important. They all belonged to the generation mentioned by Kornatowska. The first three especially held at that time a very strong position in Polish cinema <sup>28</sup>.

\* \* \*

Let us start with Sławomir Idziak and his role in the feature-length film debut by Krzysztof Kieślowski, *Blizna (The Scar, 1976)*, which is interesting because it combines the documentary strategy, characteristic for Kieślowski, with a very precisely rendered form of shots. The film tells the story of the problems of the director of a large industrial plant – an honest and good “manager” (Franciszek Pieczka), who is forced however to make far-reaching compromises. These are the result of operating in the socio-political realities of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) from the mid-1960s to December 1970. The life and actions of the director, shown in a number of episodes, are portrayed as a gradual process of loss of influence on the company’s policies, something that in fact turns out to be part of the wider historical process. We have here the fundamental conflict of those years: the authorities *contra* society. The problem of the authorities’ isolation from society, and at the same time its expansiveness, also found expression in the visual concept of the film. It illustrates the reality of the degradation of private and public spaces, the result of the grandiosity of socialist industrialization plans. In addition to the events of the narrative, the conflict between authorities/planning and people/realities was also suggestively depicted through the visual principle of contrasts. This is mainly achieved by the choice and importance of space, and its photographic arrangement in Idziak’s shots. The space of authority, and its attributes, is contrasted with the space of the local community. The “seizing” of the space by the authorities (and politics) is shown right from the first sequence of the film as a physical intervention in space – parades of black cars driving through the forest from the local Regional Committee to Olecko. The expansion of industrial space, planned in offices, brings instant results: felling of the forest, degradation of the land. The building process is transformed into a process in which the old natural and social fabric is destroyed. The pictures created by Idziak tell us more about this than any dialogue (for example, the scenes of the people’s protests at meetings organized by factory management).

Maintained in cool colour schemes and based on the contrasts of chiaroscuro, Idziak’s shots display artistic coherence, despite the mix of the *stricte* fictional with the para-documentary. Scenes from the small town to which the director returns after many years, and where nearby a factory is being built, are in the convention of documentary observation. In just a few takes, the provincial and impoverished character of this small town is highlighted. The picnic to celebrate the opening of the plant and the First of May demonstration are shot as documentary-reportage. The documentary model most fully comes to the fore, however, in scenes of meetings between the authorities and the town people arranged by the filmmaker. These scenes, based on the filming of “talking heads” in the manner characteristic of Kieślowski’s documentaries, use a mix of genuine statements and newspeak. The



*The Scar*, dir. Krzysztof Kieślowski (1976)

Photo courtesy of Filмотeka Narodowa

radical reduction of the background detail in the scenes of meetings and party conferences filmed indoors was a very interesting way of arranging the shots to emphasize the aforementioned conflicts and the division between authority and society. The backdrop is then generally dark and flatly composed. This remains in contrast to the outdoor pictures and those that show the space of the town, which are filled with a large number of details.

One of the qualities of the cinematographer's work in *The Scar* is the skilful combining of shots taken with "wide" lens with those taken with long-focus lens. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that Idziak often uses the long-focus lens throughout the film. It is distinctive that the shots taken with this lens are not exclusively limited to documentary and observational functions. The long-focus lens was also used in many entirely staged scenes. The footage made with these lenses is characterized by a compositional and staging precision (a careful choice of background, a composition of intra-frame motion), and the sensitive use of natural conditions and aerial perspective (e.g. snow, fog, smoke). The "narrowing" of the space visible in the frame, typical of shots made with long-focus lenses, allowed the filmmakers to highlight certain elements of that space as particularly significant in the background behind the actors (e.g. the red and white flags during the celebration of the First of May), and helped create an impression of the main protagonist's deepening isolation in relation to his surroundings.

In *The Scar* we can also detect certain attempts at metaphorising the space and the picture. This happens in the important "family" scene, where the director talks to his daughter against the backdrop of a cemetery lit by candlelight in the distance. This scene is also shot using a long-focus lens. In the final sequence of the film, the image of the workers' demonstration in December 1970, seen from behind net curtains in the director's office, is enveloped in winter fog.

The main intention behind the staging (and at the same time its problem) in *The Scar* was to convincingly weave documentary elements, authentic places and people's behaviour in the fictional structure of the film. The aesthetic quality of the footage, however, goes far beyond the documentary manner. It is characterized by artistic consistency and visual unity. There is a cool elegance about it but it certainly does not try to embellish reality. Instead, it seeks the visual synthesis of the aforementioned semantic conflicts. Yet behind this visual unity lurks reality degraded, full of gaps and incomplete statements. The intentions and actions of the hero sink into the substance of the physical world and prove to be too weak and ineffective.

There is in *The Scar* a kind of distance from the represented reality. The reasons for this probably lie in the subject chosen, which is associated with the "poetics of production"; it is also evident in the acting of Franciszek Pieczka, and in Idziak's accurate shots. In his subsequent feature films from the 1970s, Kieślowski will continue to prefer the methods of documentary and strive for a greater transparency of image than in *The Scar*. Idziak, working with other directors on CMA films, will also somewhat change his mode of expression. This is particularly evident in two later works – *Dyrygent (The Conductor)* by Andrzej Wajda, and *Kontrakt (Contract)* by Krzysztof Zanussi.

*The Conductor* (1979, released in 1980) is a story about the quest for higher values – the ideals of art – in a world devoid of such values. The potential for freedom contained in art, which in the film is embodied by a "real artist", the world-famous conductor (John Gielgud), who after many years returns to the country, is contrasted with the conformism of an arriviste, the director of a provincial orchestra (Andrzej Seweryn). The main setting for the events, a middle-sized town (Radom), is depicted in a rather schematic visual way as a degraded space. The most obvious manifestation of this is an old pre-war house (the protagonists live there) frequently shown in the film, standing in the middle of unrendered communist apartment blocks. These pictures are in turn contrasted with the monumentalised modern space of New York, from where the Conductor comes. Additionally, the streets and the empty concert hall lobbies, photographed by Idziak, have a despoiled character, deprived of energy. In *The Conductor*, the limitations of the space of action and the lack of a strong dramatic storyline meant that the film lacked convincing detail; furthermore, the methods of shooting and directing, focusing on a "behavioural" description, were not able to penetrate the psyche of the characters, recording only their grimaces (Andrzej Seweryn) or their statuesqueness (John Gielgud). They failed even in the case of the main protagonist, played by Krystyna Janda. Her final monologue, in which she says that *only those who truly love music are free with the aim – as Krzysztof Mętrak wrote – of shedding light on any doubts and giving the audience a specific direction of interpretation, is in fact – we believe – tautological in relation to the picture, and a rather unfortunate addition*<sup>29</sup>. Paradoxically therefore, the film that was to bear witness to the freedom that real art can bring became one of Wajda's least creative undertakings. Possibly it was because *the film director never had any particular inclination or great devotion to the "small realism" background, the superficial "small details of life", and if he did, it was for the genre and individuality*<sup>30</sup> – argued Mętrak, stating at the end of the article that although *The Conductor* was almost certainly born of noble intentions, the final result lacked in some way clarity, an emotional, pictorial message, stylistic dis-

*tinctiveness and the wonderful tension between Picture and Issue, which emanates from Wajda's best works* <sup>31</sup>.

Visual effects used by Idziak in *The Conductor*, by which we generally mean the use of wide lens, frequent medium group plans and half close-ups, the hand-held camera, the quest for the neutral effect of daylight, and a high contrast of lighting in the indoor night scenes based on enhanced effect lighting (e.g. night lamps or chandeliers), resulted in a much more convincing effect in *The Contract* by Krzysztof Zanussi.

*The Contract* (1980) is something of a caustic pamphlet on the Polish middle classes and the intelligentsia of the late 1970s. The film footage successfully sets people and events in the material realities of Poland – this time in the capital city. We see the grey, wintery city centre of Warsaw, mainly the indoors – an airport, a bar, and the home of a local worthy (Tadeusz Łomnicki) in particular, where a wedding and the ensuing psychodrama takes place. A certain neutrality of lighting and composition of shots allowed the filmmakers to reproduce the film set detail and, together with the technique of hand-held camera, it remained open to improvisational acting (movements, gestures), typical of Zanussi's methods of directing. The result is a richly detailed picture of human types and of reality, with an element of caricature to it. Just as in *The Conductor*, however, if any positive values are allowed to appear in it, it is only against a strongly negative background related to the description of the material world and the human behaviour that is part of it.

It is equally difficult to find such values in the world depicted in *Constans* (*The Constant Factor*, 1980), another of Zanussi's films shot by Idziak. *The Constant Factor* differs from *The Contract* in that its storyline is from a clearly individual perspective. Its form is relatively close to the film essay, already known from *Struktura kryształu* (*The Structure of Crystal*) or *Iluminacja* (*Illumination*). It shows a fragment of the biography of a young boy from an intelligentsia background, a typical Zanussi hero, and the process of his internal crystallization and his attempts at diagnosing the external reality. The sphere of internal beliefs and the empirical sphere are radically contrasted here, while at the same time shown to be in a mutual relationship. The hero strongly disagrees with the rules in force in human relationships, or rather with the lack of them (dishonesty, hypocrisy, corruption, "connections"). The area that fascinates him, and in which he discerns such rules, is mathematics. As an ideal science, however, it is obviously outside of empirical experience and everyday life. Zanussi asks questions about the possibility of choosing the reasons for one's actions and about their criteria, and the potential and nature of freedom. It is freedom that explains the hero's conduct. It is freedom that becomes apparent in the infallible voice of conscience. But is it truly infallible? The moral anxiety of Zanussi's protagonist is revealed as a conflict between "existence and duties". He constantly wavers between mundane reality and the bright ethical ideal, but when he finally gains unwavering certainty, it is destroyed by chance or fate. These problems are of course visualised through Idziak's shots.

Most of the film is based on wide lens shots, taken with a hand-held camera, in dynamic compositions set in the substance of the external world, but also frequently focused on the faces of the protagonists. The ambient outdoor light is amplified with artificial light indoors, magnifying the expressiveness of the picture. The



*Camouflage*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1976)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

space, although ordinary, carries hidden meanings, while shots emphasising details or enhancing the colour of the light contribute to it. The public spaces typical of communist Poland (PRL) dominate here – backyards, houses, estates, streets, hospitals, places of work and others, all described with visual shortcuts. This is definitely a hostile space accompanied by a sense of neglect and emotional coldness. It is an empirical reality in which wanton decay and death lurks (see the scenes with the hero's dying mother). Significantly, the symbolic spaces – the church or the cemetery – are also depicted with a strong emphasis on the material element of reality. In the physical and moral sense, the empirical and social reality turns out to be sick. The hero unsuccessfully seeks refuge in it.

Opposing this is the true and at the same time imaginary space of the mountains. It appears in the film right from the beginning and then in a few storyline scenes, or is shown in shots not directly involved in action. Mountains represent a space of longed for freedom, missing down below, and are also a sign of something, which in Kantian terms could be described as the sublime, infinity revealed in sensual nature, and therefore the predestination of the moral being.

Yet another kind of space appears in the film. Its presence is related to the hero's business trip to India. This space, shot with the clear dominance of warm colours and light tones, symbolizes the acceptance of the "order of the universe" characteristic of the Eastern cultures, with which, however, the hero from Poland cannot, or will not, identify.

*The Constant Factor* is a film in which we observe the struggle of a fully conscious individual for independence from the sphere of empirical and social determinism. In the visual layer, it is governed by the principle of contrasts, although used by Idziak differently here than in *The Scar*. The shots are carefully composed (mainly in motion), yet dynamic and to a certain degree open – they contain a certain density of significant detail.

When making films in the 1970s and 1980s, Krzysztof Zanussi knew *how to enrich dialogue with a religious, metaphysical or scientific content, while still keeping it as the most everyday and trivial determination*<sup>32</sup>. He also knew how to enrich a film with such content. Undoubtedly the cinematographers played a large part in this. This is aptly exemplified in *Camouflage*, a film considered to be one of the first of the CMA movement, made with the cinematographer Edward Kłosiński. His contribution to the movement and more generally to the Polish film is enormous. If we just consider the years that interest us here, 1976-1981, it was he who shot the best films by Wajda, Falk, Zaorski and Zanussi<sup>33</sup>. Although Kłosiński's area was unquestionably the feature film, and not the documentary, as was the case for some of his colleagues, in most of his works he produced shots particularly receptive to reality. This was certainly the result of a conscious creative strategy, about which he said at that time: *I consider myself a continuator, if not an heir to a certain thought that has existed in the cinema for some time and whose exponents here are Jerzy Wójcik and Witold Sobociński. I aim for the maximum "naturalization" of shots, I believe, for example, that the so-called creative lighting or the evidently creative method of filming is only suitable for a few subjects. Photography cannot be a "sheet" separating the film from the viewer. If the shots are so aggressive that the spectator in the cinema begins to rave about "how beautiful they are", the essence of the film eludes him. I try not to "stick out" from behind the camera, not to dazzle with special shots (...)*<sup>34</sup>.

This is also the case in *Camouflage* (1976, released in 1977), one of Krzysztof Zanussi's most successful films. The hidden intellectual potential, the brilliant analysis of human behaviour, and the intimate form of the film, bring to mind what Roman Polański and Jerzy Lipman did a few years earlier, filming *Nóż w wodzie* (*Knife in the Water*) – but this time in a different milieu and period. Just as in that film, here the ambiguous meaning of the film is also achieved by limiting the space and time of action; here also there is a distinct conflict between the attitudes of the main protagonists, inscribed in a realistic setting. The emotional and mental tension that permeates the film results from an accurate harmonization of the dialogue, the acting, and the camera work. At the same time, Zanussi remained entirely within the sphere of his own artistic, situational and intellectual interests.

In its first layer of meaning, it provides a picture of an academic community – students, lecturers, and the university authorities, set in the confined space of an academic camp, a specific study therefore of the relations between members of academic intelligentsia. The first shots in the film, taken with a hand-held camera in the manner of a reportage, introduce the viewer into the milieu. Immediately, however, the style of reportage is subject to correction. Images become saturated with metaphorical meanings, set in natural but significant scenery. Two protagonists are singled out from the group of people – a young, principled assistant (Piotr Garlicki), and an "old hand", a cynical, "devilishly" intelligent assistant professor (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz). The conflict of their attitudes and beliefs (as well as the unmasking of the illusions that accompanied them) can be interpreted on at least three levels – as a realistic psychodrama with some elements of comedy; as a morality play; and as a philosophical dialogue in which one of the main threads is to try to answer the question of what beliefs and ensuing attitudes can be based upon, including those that are called "ethical".

Throughout the film, Kłosiński's shots accurately reflect these three levels, maintaining precision and internal unity. They are in particular characterised by the excellent use of the space of action – interior spaces, and chiefly exterior locations, which are in mutual relationship. We see a closed space with the potential for an opening contained in it. Kłosiński has successfully used natural conditions in the footage, such as for example the wooded copse in the park, where the protagonists wander, or the open-air location by the river. In confrontation with the dialogue, they create the added value of the film.

Another key feature of the film footage is the clever use of natural lighting. There is the chiaroscuro contrast on the faces introducing anxiety – the effect of sunlight and shade from the trees; there are brilliantly used sunsets and dusk effects reinforcing the artistic expression of the shots through the colour of the light; and finally in the closing scene, there is rain. The natural light was complemented with artificial light. A “realistic pretext” for its use was usually some ambient lighting effect, for example coming from an open window of a building or from above the entrance to the camping cabins.

But the most important method, used very consistently throughout the film, is the technique of shooting with the hand-held camera. It is important that in this case it does not always adopt the manner of reportage (only in some scenes). It is primarily used to get the viewer closer to the actor and his acting, and to brilliantly compose movement within the frame. The latter on the other hand significantly enhances interpersonal tensions and dependencies, at the same time setting it in a micro-social and natural environment.

*In order to say something to someone's face we need a close-up. These days we describe events in close-ups – said Krzysztof Zanussi when taking part in a debate on the style of Polish film, published in 1980 in the monthly magazine “Kino”<sup>35</sup>. Whereas at that time, Edward Kłosiński specified his method of filming as follows: *The distance of the camera from the actor has its importance. The actor was used to the camera being away from him by two or three meters. Zapasiewicz, after the first day of shooting “Camouflage”, when I was walking with the camera between the actors, said: “I can't act; this thing is looking at me all the time”. A small black box disrupts the intimacy of the actor's experience, and so he acquires different reflexes, knowing that he is being watched almost police-like. But after the first projection Zapasiewicz was convinced*<sup>36</sup>.*

It is precisely on this special closeness between camera and actor (once again, Zbigniew Zapasiewicz) that the shots for the 1978 *Bez znieczulenia* (*Rough Treatment* or *Without Anesthesia*) by Andrzej Wajda are largely based. We watch the mental and physical demise of the main protagonist in a whole range of close-ups. He is a well-known journalist and writer suddenly condemned to solitude (his wife has left him) and professional isolation (he is no longer “useful” to the authorities). Throughout the film, the camera work is chiefly focused on observing the gradual process whereby energy for life drains from the hero. The spaces in which he moves – the anonymous lobby of the publishing house, the crowded law office, the court (where the divorce case takes place) and other offices – which are shown as we follow the disastrous trials and tribulations of the hero, are contrasted with the space of his home, which until now was a refuge for him and yet turns out to be a death trap in this new situation (the final explosion of gas). Despite the limited space of



*Contract*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1980)

Photo courtesy of FilMOTEKA Narodowa

action and a certain “transparency” of operational methods used by Kłosiński (open compositions, hand-held camera motion, natural light, and sparse use of artificial light indoors), *Bez znieczulenia* convincingly depicts the drama of a hunted man, mainly thanks to Zapasiewicz’s own performance and the precise organization of the screen space in Kłosiński’s shots.

Right from the very first scene of the film, the image of reality in which the drama unfolds, with its devastating lack of clear standards of conduct and official “machinations”, is contrasted with the fictional reality created by the television – a reality cognitively and ethically “muffled” according to predetermined schemes and methods convenient for the authorities. The TV “hype”, i.e. the ubiquitous pictures in the reality of the late PRL, versus true reality, is a constant motif present in CMA films. The pressure of television also makes its presence felt in the finale of *Wodzirej* (*Top Dog*) – a film by Feliks Falk, with shots by Kłosiński.

In *Top Dog* (1978), the filmmakers have managed to fully use two fundamentally new technical improvements, which appeared in Polish film in the 1970s: the complete recording of sound on set, and the quiet and mobile camera allowing the recording of this sound while freely moving in natural interiors. It was precisely the use of these methods that helped realize the potential of Falk’s screenplay and Jerzy Stuhr’s dialogues. In *Top Dog*, we can see an almost perfect blend of two distinctive features of CMA realism: a dynamically developing storyline with a distinctive hero, and authentic scenery, saturated with local detail. The plot revolves around the adventures of “a man in a hurry” – a provincial stage performer pursuing at all cost his goal, which for him is to achieve success, i.e. to lead a prestigious



*Contract*, dir. Krzysztof Zanussi (1980)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

ball. In reality, the true subject is the problem of a career, and more specifically the lack of principles in the efforts undertaken towards one's advancement. Danielak played by Stuhr, is the "man from nowhere", who seemingly has nothing to lose. Consequently, he decides to act with a vengeance, not paying any attention to honesty. The dynamics of his actions are reflected in the dynamics of Kłosiński's shots – in the movement and the compositions of the frames. The camera almost incessantly squeezes through narrow flats and corridors, through labyrinth-like auditorium lobbies and restaurants – empty during the day and filled with people in the evening; it tracks Danielak's progress – in front of him, behind him and from the side, below and above, it pauses with him for a while to take a breath, and then moves on right up to the final musical procession of the ball that Danielak eventually leads, having got rid of the competition. These dynamic scenes are mostly shot with a wide lens, which as if by chance records the details of the real background – the cramped and cluttered flats, the tacky decor of the stage platforms. This type of shot is sometimes countered with still frames, capturing a face in the crowd or a detail in the background.

The expression of the film visually enhanced but close to reality, is also affected by the lighting used. Kłosiński freely mixes natural and artificial light, ambient light (e.g. the fluorescent lamps in hallways) with light he himself set up. He reinforced the latter with many special light effects, which are often visible directly in the frame (e.g. spotlights on stage). Of course all these effects – the spotlight sharply defining portraits, the coloured light, and the multicoloured light reflections in the background – were considerably amplified and organized into a pulsating

whole. In between shots of interiors, we see images of grey PRL streets. Danielak makes his way within this environment. The ambivalence of his person lies in the fact that he is similar to a “fireball”, casting some “black light” on the world which surrounds him, a world deep in inertia, tacky and devoid of values. Danielak moves within this world, he is its own product, and at the same time undermines it by his dynamism and ruthlessness. He is a mixture of evil and a vital force, which forces him into action. It is hard to resist the thought that the blow he receives from a betrayed friend at the end of the film fails to eliminate this ambivalence.

This ambiguity in the protagonists’ portrayal and the creative dynamics are lacking in the next film by Falk and Kłosiński, *Szansa* (*Chance*, 1979, released in 1980).

Kłosiński used other, quite minimalistic methods when working with Janusz Zaorski, firstly in *Pokój z widokiem na morze* (*A Room With a View on the Sea*, 1977, released in 1978), and then in *Dziecinne pytania* (*Childish Questions*, 1981). In the first movie, the intimacy of action significantly restricted the visual possibilities available to the filmmakers. On the other hand, Kłosiński decides in *Childish Questions* on an almost complete transparency of the cinematic processes used. The film is about a group of friends, young architects, who are working on the plans and construction of a housing estate. The economic and social realities of communist Poland make it impossible for them to fulfil their youthful dreams. Soon they are forced to compromise both their lives and their work. The theme here is the disintegration of the intellectual community that happened after March 1968 (the film refers to that period in short flashbacks), the lack of influence the intelligentsia had on reality in the second half of the 1970s, as well as the resulting pauperization of intellectuals and the fictitious nature of communist economic plans. At the visual level this is clearly illustrated by the scene of action – an unfinished housing estate, cramped flats, gloomy bars, grey crowds of people on neglected city streets. This is the typical scenery of many CMA films, captured with “transparent” photography this time and unobtrusive to the viewer.

Jacek Petrycki, the cinematographer in Agnieszka Holland’s feature film debut *Aktorzy prowincjonalni* (*Provincial Actors*, 1978, released in 1979), was a product of the school of documentary film. Before *Provincial Actors* and in the 1970s alone he shot several dozen documentaries, working with, among others, Krzysztof Kieślowski (e.g. in *Robotnicy 1971 – Nic o nas bez nas* /*Workers 1971 – Nothing About Us Without Us*/ in 1972; *Pierwsza miłość* /*First Love*/ in 1974; *Szpital* /*Hospital*/ in 1977) and with Marcel Łoziński (e.g. *Jak żyć* /*Recipe for Life*/ in 1977) or Irena Kamińska (*Zapora* /*The Dam*/ in 1976). Although he had no experience of working on a full-length feature film when he began to film *Provincial Actors*, he had already completed the following successful and prominent television productions: *Spokój* (*The Calm*, 1976, released in 1980) with Kieślowski, and *Coś za coś* (*Something for Something*) with Holland. His ability to bring the authenticity of documentary to staged shots proved very valuable in *Provincial Actors*. This is what Agnieszka Holland had to say about him: *Jacek had such an incredible sense of truth. His shots were not as impressive as some of his colleagues, even Jurek Zieliński. He had some technical troubles, for example he was a very incompetent camera operator. His lighting was naturalistic, a little dirty; it was always on the border of technical acceptability. At the same time he had his own wonderful feeling for the truth. The reality he shot was always extremely convincing. That was one thing that I liked. And this*

came from the documentary, but also resulted from his honesty. (...) He suited me very well, because we both wanted this film to have a realist texture<sup>37</sup>.

*We have to do something, something that depends on us* – repeats the main protagonist in the film, played by Tadeusz Huk. *Provincial Actors* is a work in which the main issues are the inauthenticity of official culture, the disintegration of community (the family, society), the result of the distorted rules governing reality, hopelessness and a conformist reluctance to fundamentally change this reality. These problems were dramatized using the example of a provincial theatre. The main character, a relatively young actor, dreams of playing the honest and important role of Konrad, in the staged play *Wyzwolenie (Liberation)* by Wyspiański. These dreams do not materialize of course since everyone else treats the work on the show as nothing more than a paid job. Reality reveals its degenerate and hypocritical face and our hero is left at the end with no illusions as to the possibility of changing it. This image of reality, and the people trapped in it, is further complicated by the fact that these problems of inauthenticity and lies also directly concern the main hero. His intentions and conduct are not as crystal clear as he thinks. His artistic ambitions are accompanied by a prosaic desire to get a position in a better theatre and to escape the provinces. His obsessive, ultimately ineffective efforts to achieve these goals are one of the reasons for the disintegration of his marriage. His wife feels rejected and increasingly lost and lonely (an excellent performance by Halina Łabonarska, awarded the prize for best actress at the Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk in 1979).

The references to *Liberation* bring two additional semantic planes to Holland's film: the self-reflexive and the metaphorical. In the first, the main issue is the false attitude towards culture, or manipulation, which can obscure the truth about the meaning of art and the realities of life (the creative methods of staging art proposed by the film director); while in the second – just as in Wyspiański – the question is how can we liberate art and life from lies<sup>38</sup>. Despite the presence of this interesting metaphorical sphere, the visual layer of the film adheres to the reality of the provincial theatre and the family life of the main hero and his wife (Halina Łabonarska).

Petrycki usually used open frame compositions in his shots, often including many people in the theatre scenes and two people in the household scenes. By using neutral-coloured lighting, he created an effect of natural light or amplified the artificial light effect indoors (e.g. with small lamps in the dressing room). This method of lighting makes it possible to see the texture and detail of the background behind the actors. Of course this is made easier by using wide-angle lens. We see in the film, however, a tendency to narrow the space on screen and focus on characters' actions. This creates an illusion of a deepening claustrophobia. The reality in the background appears fragmented. From this chaotic scenery micro-observations are sometimes drawn, especially in open-air locations (the workers digging a hole in the ground in front of the theatre, a queue in front of a shop at six o'clock in the morning, a messy dustbin in front of the hero's house).

It is characteristic that the metaphorical meanings appearing in the film, interwoven in the plot thanks to references to *Liberation*, are not directly reflected in the picture. The film's only style is realism. Despite this, says Mariola Jankun-Dopart, the semantic duality specific to Wyspiański's drama is also in some way present in Holland's film – in an ironic way: *The period style is replaced here with a realistic picture of a theatrical community in the second half of the 1970s, with*

*all its intellectual shallowness, artistic superficiality, vulgarity of language and triviality. Private life is only an extension of what we see in the theatre; Wyspiański's postulate to merge art with life acquires here an ironic character*<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the metasense of Holland's film is made of fragments of reality captured in Petrycki's shots and parts of texts and situations drawn from *Liberation*<sup>40</sup>. To summarise our observations on *Provincial Actors*, we can say that the shots by Petrycki are less aesthetically pleasing, in terms of colour and composition, than those by Idziak in the discussed CMA films, and less dynamic than Kłosiński's, but more sensitive in their observation, more attentive.

Such an intense attention and precision are present to an even greater degree in the film *Amator* (*Camera Buff*, 1979) by Krzysztof Kieślowski. There Petrycki refined and developed a realistic style of photography, achieving at the same time – in conjunction with the filmmaker's rhythm of narration and editing – a particular purity of expression. We can discern an exceptional appropriateness of cinematic methods employed in relation to the undertaken topic. The incoherent and fragmented nature of reality is captured in a coherent manner that is nevertheless open to interpretation. The veristic, sometimes even paradocumentary, means used are carefully organized into a whole. They include: light imitating the quality of ambient light, natural on location at different times of day and artificial indoors; camera angles chosen so that one feels one is an invisible participant in events in real settings: in front of a block of flats on an unfinished housing estate, on the street of a provincial town, in flats and offices, etc.

But from behind this veristic picture another level of reality emerges. The film becomes a vehicle for reflection on the cinematic medium. The hero, the eponymous amateur filmmaker Filip Mosz (Jerzy Stuhr), suddenly loses his peace of mind and familial happiness because he begins to see more and differently than before – through the camera. This transformed way of seeing is also evident in the pictures created by Kieślowski and Petrycki. Paradocumentary methods are combined with precise staging. This makes what is happening merge on screen with the author's point of view. Ironically, by using apparently transparent means the filmmakers show that these in fact do not exist, that everything is a matter of decision and a constant search for adequate methods of seeing in relation to the captured reality. Ambiguity is created by weaving cinematic fragments and quotations into the fabric of the narrative – the veristic picture of reality. The amateur learns to make films, and at the same time to look at the world. The "crumbs of life" (a child, people, pigeons on the window sill) filmed by him at the beginning gradually turn into a directed record of reality set in time (we see the same window view in several scenes shot over a long period of time). Later, it transpires that this also records memories (of his friend and his now deceased mother). Then there is the problem of the fictional meta-reality that the film creates (a quotation from *Camouflage*). The subsequent paradocumentary record of the meeting between the audience and Krzysztof Zanussi introduces a motif of uncertainty, of doubting visible reality. Zanussi is saying that the artist is "never sure". This uncertainty and unawareness, however, become a proper motivation for artistic expression based on a thought-out concept and a choice of point of view. The amateur shoots his film. Using the example of an individual, he wants to depict the "wider problem" (for example, the film about an old employee). Here a confrontation begins not only with the substance of reality and cinematic methods used, but also

with the reception of the film. The film enters the public circuit (screened on TV) and gives rise to conflicting reactions from the audience (Mosz, the film's hero, friends, the director, and the authorities). In effect – the film describes reality but its complex meaning escapes it – and simultaneously creates its own reality. Here the story must start again, but this time with a deeper awareness and on another level. Which one? Mosz turns the camera on himself...

*His first documentary films* – Agnieszka Holland said years later about Kieślowski – *were done the way he was taught by his master, Kazimierz Karabasz, but Krzysztof quite quickly decided that this “pure” documentary form killed off his inspiration, was quite stiff, and does not adequately express the mystery of life. So he began to play with it, which in turn meant that he headed in the direction of storylines. “Camera Buff” was still pretty much based on his documentary style, but when we look at “Blind Chance” – we see a huge change*<sup>41</sup>.

In the second half of the 1970s, the film director Janusz Kijowski and the cinematographer Krzysztof Wyszynski formed a generational duo and played a significant part in the CMA movement with their two films – *Indeks (Index)* and *Kung-fu*. *Index* was their graduation film made jointly in 1977 under the aegis of the Film School, but its premiere only took place in 1981. This was the result of a bizarre situation – their second film *Kung-fu* (1979, released in 1980) received the award for best director debut (!) at the Festival in Gdańsk in 1979.

Krzysztof Wyszynski is a forgotten figure in Polish film. His cinematographic career in Poland ended abruptly in 1980. He made only a few pictures and his fate after 1980 is not widely known. However, in shooting three films for Kijowski (in addition to the two already mentioned there was *Głosy /Voices/* in 1980) he left his artistic mark on Polish cinema. His shots for *Index* and *Kung-fu* display features typical of other CMA films. They are dominated by open dynamic frame compositions, created using a wide lens and hand-held camera motion close to the actors, as well as neutral lighting adapted to the ambient indoors and open-air conditions, only occasionally artistically enhanced. Consequently, they are dominated by descriptiveness. It is important, however, that in Wyszynski's case this is a descriptiveness in which the camera is not limited to spying on the world and its inhabitants; instead it penetrates reality with an increased force. This is where the power of these images lies. The dynamics of Wyszynski's camera, its intrusiveness, contribute to a large degree to the edgy style of narration characteristic of Kijowski's films.

From the beginning, the action of *Index* is set in the specific historical context of March 1968, among the student community in Gdańsk. In short scenes we see the university, the streets, the police station and the coal depot, where the main protagonist works. All this is shown with naturalistic detail. Throughout the film, a remarkably wide variety of spaces are filmed with meticulous attention to detail: flats, offices, municipal offices, and metropolitan locations. However, three main types of setting can be defined: the spaces of the middle class/intelligentsia (the hero's girlfriend's home, the newspaper editorial office, etc.), the working class (the coal depot), and the authorities (UB or Office of Security, the dean's office). All these apparently separate territories interpenetrate in the film in a kind of morbid symbiosis.

Whether he likes it or not, this is the environment in which the hero operates. He is suspended in it. This is a man who wants to be honest; Józef Moneta (Krzysztof Zalewski) resigns from studies in solidarity with a colleague expelled

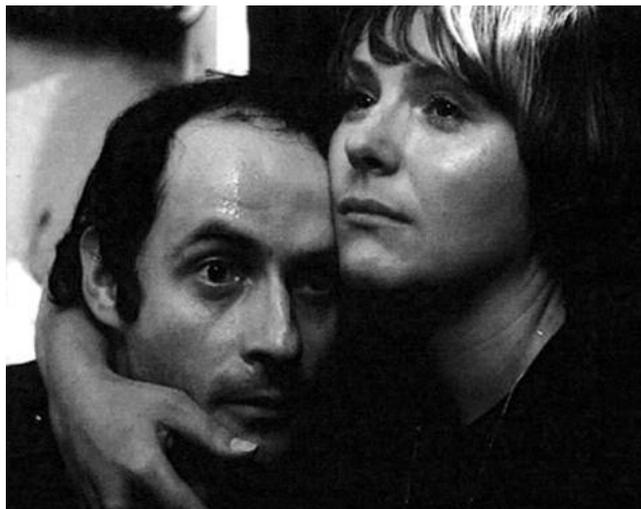
from the university. His intransigence (and temperament) is so radical, that almost every attempt to come to terms with reality ends in disaster. In fact, Moneta (and Kijowski) is trying to prove that intelligence is something more fundamental than the ability to “adapt to conditions”, as most of his friends understand it. The film strongly emphasizes the need for an authentic community; it is also a record of *the student subculture of the mid-1970s*<sup>42</sup>. We watch meetings of young people who sing the poetry of Herbert and Okudzhava: *Hey friend, give me a hand, Hey friend give me a hand – because separately they will wipe us out...*

But this realistic story seems to be in quotation marks; it becomes a metaphor – surprising for the viewer, and probably not entirely consistent in relation to the whole. We refer to the penultimate scene – the hero’s wedding. All the characters that were previously in conflict with the protagonist are present. Although he seems resigned to “reality”, he suddenly delivers a startling monologue about how “cheaply one can sell oneself”. An argument breaks out – the wedding turns into a wake. Is this the hero’s last nonconformist gesture? This scene is abstracted from the physical background and – interestingly – includes the same quotation from Stanisław Wyspiański’s *Liberation* that ended Agnieszka Holland’s *Provincial Actors*.

Maria Kornatowska believed that the visual layer of *Index*, due to the deliberately anti-aesthetical nature of the shots, *sets straight the visual clichés of depicting so-called everyday life; it exposes the stereotypical character and false vision of reality created and disseminated by the mass media, with television leading the way*<sup>43</sup>. In this manner, *Kijowski and Wszyński are close to the poetic attitude of the new wave, replacing the pursuit of truth in the word with a pursuit of truth in the image*<sup>44</sup>. In some ways this is true.

It is interesting that in one of the scenes from this film, the students gathered at a conspiratorial meeting in someone’s home debate history. Opinions are voiced, which distinguish history from ideology. Ideology is based on a selection of facts according to pre-determined theories; history on the other hand, is in some ways semantically open. The students are aware, however, that to talk about history, even as a description of actual facts, is always an interpretation depending on the choice of these facts. A description is never objective. Not without reason Kijowski himself appears on the screen at the end of this scene. The relationship between the described current and historical reality and the form in which they can be captured is one of the artistic problems of CMA. This is also the dilemma in Kijowski’s films. In view of the communist ideology dominant in Poland, the filmmaker seems to suggest that describing is not enough. A rebellious counter-proposal, even an artistic one, is needed, based this time on fragments of undistorted reality.

This strategy precisely was adopted by Kijowski in *Kung-fu*, a film about an old group of college friends, who reunite years later in order to help one of them in any possible way. Here again the realism of the depiction is associated with a certain tendency to metaphorise. The realistic element of the shots is achieved through filming interiors and natural spaces, as well as through use of the dynamic hand-held camera, penetrating these spaces, and following the protagonists “on the run”; the use of natural light in outside locations and “ambient” light indoors (e.g. fluorescent light) also contribute to it. Moreover, Wszyński considerably strengthened the colour of the light in a few scenes, to indicate the potential energy the protagonists are trying to release in order to mobilize themselves, for example, in the scene of



*Provincial Actors*, dir. Agnieszka Holland (1978)

their group kung-fu “dance” to the rhythm of the music and flashing colourful lights. Undoubtedly, *Kung-fu* has the characteristics of a rebellious manifesto... in keeping with the times. As Wanda Wertenstein wrote: in the film, *the changes of perspective, the interrupted motifs, the rapid transitions from one subject of action to another, constantly remind us that what we see on the screen is not a direct reflection of life, but cinema par excellence, and thus an arbitrary selection of events put together by the author, an artistic processing of the picture of reality*<sup>45</sup>.

\* \* \*

It is time to summarize the above observations. The discussed photographic layer is the principal foundation of realism in CMA films, although certainly not the only one. It relies on diverse ways of reproducing and describing the material world, external reality. It is important that we see consistently developed and used methods of filming in most of the discussed works; they aptly correspond with the character of the adopted realist convention. The charges of formal failings levelled at these films seem to be a misunderstanding; especially from today’s perspective, having experienced the success of *Dogme 95* or of Cannes award-winning films by the Dardenne brothers and others, which are characterized by a certain freedom of filming (abandoning the sophisticated artistic form to capture the real “truth”). From this perspective, CMA films can be seen as a link in the chain of realist tendencies of European cinema, which reach the present day. The concreteness of the image, typical for them, is based on cinematographers’ use of a common pool of visual methods and cinematic devices, taking into account nevertheless the preferences of individual directors and the subjects of their films. For example, in Zanussi’s films, the camera usually works dynamically with the actors – it follows them in a particularly sensitive way to capture the spontaneity of their acting; in Agnieszka Holland’s work, the camera penetrates deeply into the material world and explores the relationship between human behaviour and physical environment;

while in Kiesłowski, the camera alternates – at times an empathetic participant in life, at others a distanced observer.

The filmmakers' consistency of method was not limited to the photographic dimension of their films. Undoubtedly all CMA directors mentioned here were aware that a film is never a "one to one" reflection of reality. Even when the realist intention is particularly emphasised, the success of the film, the end result, depends on the synchronization of many formal factors. The successful results of such a harmonization – the treatment of subject, the dramaturgy, the shots, the acting, the dialogues, the sound, and possibly the music – can particularly be seen in *Camouflage*, *Top Dog*, *Camera Buff* or *Provincial Actors*. Not only the realities they depict, but also their form – often overlooked – made them as convincing then, as they are now.

Nevertheless it is true that this form remains largely hostage to external reality<sup>46</sup>. This is the price of the realist formula adopted. Characteristics other than the visual determine the realist nature of these works. The most important are: a desire for the typical (problems, surroundings, characters, etc.), the use of colloquial language, a preference for "real" fiction, and so complete abandonment of fantasy and subjective visions – a symbolic meaning never appears in the form of an autonomous image in these films. It also includes in particular a preference for a cause and effect, linear representation of reality and events. Despite a descriptive tendency occurring in these films, reality is shown to be an "objective" process, thus an emphasis on the action and moves of the protagonists becomes important too<sup>47</sup>.

*It is about building events in a chain of cause and effect phenomena, a multi-layered structure, directing many characters in parallel, emphasising the conflicts* – said Krzysztof Zanussi in 1978<sup>48</sup>.

We should also take into account the cognitive and axiological motivations underlying the above methods. These two last features of realist works and the discussed films – the actions and motivations of the protagonists – are in fact related. The principle of causality allows the cognitive classification and systematization of reality, while the subject's actions, resulting from his will – as Roman Ingarden noted – may be a vehicle for morality<sup>49</sup>. This general scheme and the main features of realism can be identified in the films discussed. We can assume that they depict the conflict between the individuals acting as potential "carriers" of values and the world's realities, mainly social and political. The main hero is usually part of the intelligentsia (an engineer, journalist, scientist, teacher, actor, architect, student, etc.) or aspiring to this (an amateur – *Camera Buff*). Whereas the social reality depicted in the films revealed a state of an "axiological depression" – the relativism of basic values and the attempts to create new canons of distorted values, characteristic of the Polish communist era – as Dobrochna Dabert put it<sup>50</sup>. In this context in particular some fundamental questions may arise.

Even if we assume that a moral action does not just depend on the subject's higher awareness (e.g. a categorical imperative), and can be part of a certain "order of existence" as part of empirical conditioning (for example politically or related to social custom), an important question remains: what conditions these values? And what is the status of values?

Roman Ingarden wrote that values are influenced in four fundamental ways: by the valuable object; by the evaluating subject; in both ways (by object and subject); or in a way that is independent of object and subject<sup>51</sup>.

According to Ingarden, as far as the status of values is concerned, it may be real (existing just as objects, people, and animals do) or intentional (like thoughts, feelings, volitions/wants)<sup>52</sup>. We should also remember that Ingarden advocated finding a third, intermediate “mode of existence”, which would combine the real and the intentional<sup>53</sup>.

In this context, we note that the status and conditioning of values in the CMA films discussed are particularly ambiguous and difficult to grasp. They are not to be found in external reality, they are also not conditioned by any higher necessity. We can say that if they appear it is instead in an intentional way, because generally they are limited to the realm of the protagonists’ ideas, feelings and desires and, incidentally, are usually unfulfilled. Such an intentional status of values can also be in danger of illusoriness.

But as Adam Workowski writes: *Ethical values are realized in the inner life of man – and not externally. An ethical hero has a turbulent inner life, but does not want to be different from others. His activities are repetitive, because what is creative is happening inside him. (...) Ethical values are usually not revealed in the moment, but over time*<sup>54</sup>.

Another question arises here: was this inner sphere in which values may crystallize with time adequately recognized, understood, and depicted in these films? This relates both to the realist convention of these works, as well as to the protagonists themselves as a potential medium of values. In other words: can realist motivation and form be sufficient to depict the world of values? It seems that the filmmakers were aware of this question, although in most cases they were not entirely able to cope with it.

In each of the discussed films we can discern a common realist tendency, and two main difficulties that accompany it. Firstly, there appeared the desire to show a true picture of the real world. This vision was created mainly on the basis of the filmed reflection of the real world. The first difficulty was therefore the confrontation between the reality reproduced on the screen and the truth about it, understood as something more than just adequacy of description, but largely as a revelation of the presence or absence of values and norms. Thus, the actions of the protagonists, through which the presence or absence of values could be revealed, proved to be primarily entangled in the material inertia of the depicted world. Here appeared a second difficulty, namely the authorial (director’s and cinematographer’s) awareness, more or less acute, of being entangled in realist convention, in a behavioural method of describing the world. The principle of metonymy that the CMA’s creative strategy was based on was not enough<sup>55</sup>. Attempts were consequently undertaken to metaphorise or parabolise the filmed reality, through various dramatic and visual devices (but still within a quite rigid realistic framework). This has worked with varying degrees of success, as illustrated by *The Constant Factor* (the pictures of mountains), *Camera Buff* (the self-reflexive motifs), *Provincial Actors* (the thread of *Liberation*) or *Index* (the wedding scene). But the gravity of material reality, lying at the heart of the realist film description, always dominated. So the world depicted in these films appears above all “unsubstantialist”, as an irrational substance like a sponge cohesive and porous at the same time – as the philosopher György Lukács would perhaps put it<sup>56</sup>.

Attempts to define the specific nature of the CMA films were accompanied by observations, mentioned in this article, on certain similarities between the film-

makers' artistic principles and the strategy proposed by the formation Young Culture, expressed in the poetic works of the new wave. This connection seems to be indisputable. However, while the ideology of Young Culture was truly close to the CMA creators (the move towards social reality, description, ethical reflection etc.), the question arises as to how much the form of these films may correspond to the methods preferred by poets. Obviously, it is difficult to find clear analogies because of the different artistic material and creative process of these works. It is however worth reflecting on. It is important that the fundamental method for the poets was based on a certain play with the language that dominated life and social awareness in communist Poland. As noted by Michał Głowiński, the openness and clarity of this play was based on the language's exhibited visibility<sup>57</sup>. It was about revealing the mechanisms of official language, in order to discredit it. A poem thus carried an explosive charge – it negated what it was made of i.e. language<sup>58</sup>. But the poets moved from criticism of language to criticism of the world in which that language functioned. Linguistic poetry proved to be social poetry, moving *from playing with language to moralizing*<sup>59</sup>.

In CMA films, the intensity of this manipulation, its subversive power, appears to be much weaker, although undoubtedly traces of such a practice can be found, for instance in the aforementioned attempts at parabolization or metaphORIZATION. Where else? In the frequent quotations of television pictures? In the dynamics of film production, as a way of “annexing” methods specific to performances of popular culture for their own purposes? In the authorial irony that appears at times? It is difficult to resist the thought that this revealing play on the language of cinema, television, pop culture and propaganda was somewhat suppressed by the “iron corset” of realist convention. We can say that although the “solidity” of language served poetry well, in film, based on photographic solidity, some other device could perhaps have helped to break conventions and clichés<sup>60</sup>. It is difficult to find a clear answer. Nevertheless in sticking with realism, the filmmakers were condemned to dealing with the weaknesses and incoherence of the depicted exterior world – hostile to ideals and antagonistic to the human soul.

*Biological and sociological life* – wrote György Lukács – *has a profound tendency to remain within its own immanence; men want only to live, structures want to remain intact (...)*<sup>61</sup>. Had the CMA filmmakers not encountered precisely what the philosopher called the “unrepresentability” of the world in a directly sensual creation?

*Both the parts and the whole of such an outside world defy any forms of directly sensuous representation. They acquire life only when they can be related either to the life-experiencing interiority of the individuals lost in their labyrinth, or to the observing and creative eye of the artist's subjectivity: when they become objects of mood or reflection*<sup>62</sup>. Are this “life-experiencing interiority” and the clearly formulated “artist's subjectivity” not lacking in the discussed films? In this context returns the issue of the hero as a potential vehicle of values, as well as the question of the presence and cinematic status of these values. Furthermore, Lukács's quotations from his *Theory of the Novel* are not recalled here by accident. He wrote: *for the subject is constitutive only when it acts from within – i.e. only the ethical subject is constitutive*<sup>63</sup>.

Mariola Jankun-Dopart, who described the CMA hero, called him a “problematic hero”, referring precisely to Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*. He is not just a man

wary of reality (the influence of Young Culture), but above all a stranger in a world devoid of the clear landmarks and goals that might provide a direction in life<sup>64</sup>. Strictly speaking, however, the CMA films show only *the birth* or *the awakening* of the problematic hero, according to Dopart; this might happen through a *false initiation* experienced by the hero, which contributed to the growth of his self-knowledge – *he already realized that he must undergo by himself another, authentic initiation, that he must identify reality for his own use, to bear witness to his own values (...)*<sup>65</sup>.

So we can say that the typical CMA hero – although it is difficult to make far-reaching generalizations – might barely aspire to the rank of “problematic hero”. But was he becoming one in reality? Is it possible that these protagonists might receive one more chance of initiation, apart from the negative one shown in the films, to truly become such a hero? If so, then they most certainly were not given this chance in the filmic reality of the discussed works. For this reason it is difficult to call them “problematic heroes” in the true sense of the word, attributed to it by Lukács. The difference is that the real “problematic hero” as a rule aims much higher and looks much further. He is a stranger in a world “without gods”, alone, yet at the same time totally aware of his inner freedom as an ethical subject (in the Kantian sense). Certainly reconciliation with social reality is dear to him, but his main strength of action is Goethe’s “demonism”. If we consider the CMA protagonists, these are only the features of some of them (e.g. the hero of *The Constant Factor*, perhaps *Index?*).

Most of all however – and this is probably the biggest difference – the “problematic hero” belongs to a work that in its configuration seeks to restore the whole of the world, the balance *between becoming and being*<sup>66</sup>; such a hero is part of work based on the *ethic of the creative subjectivity*<sup>67</sup>, in which, however, the danger of ethical subjectification of the world<sup>68</sup> is removed by ironic reflectiveness<sup>69</sup>. *This world* – wrote Lukács at the end of his book – *is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as a social being nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority*<sup>70</sup>.

In the CMA films the actions of the protagonists – however much we sympathize with them – do not lead us to this “total world”, because these heroes do not in fact form the strong core of these works. The inner world of the hero is not made accessible to the viewers through elements of the outside world, and if so, only to a small degree. The subjective core becomes fragmented precisely because it is engulfed by the outside world around it, by matter. If we were to look for “problematic heroes” in Polish cinema we could find them not in CMA, but in the works of Has, Różewicz, Konwicki or Żuławski. Only Lukács’s later thoughts might prove useful when attempting to reflect on CMA – those related to the theory of realism that is the conception of art as a materialist reflection of reality. But this is a rather different Lukács, more distant from the youthful idealism that permeates his *Theory of the Novel*. He at that time wrote: *The more “artless” a work of art, the more it gives the effect of life and nature, the more clearly it exemplifies an actual concentrated reflection of its times and the more clearly it demonstrates that the only function of its form is the expression of this objectivity, this reflection of life in the greatest concreteness and clarity and with all its motivating contradictions*<sup>71</sup>.

The mirroring of reality is one of the main commandments of realism, film realism included. In his *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer recalled the following mythical story in order to illustrate this: Perseus was able to kill Medusa (Gorgon) only because he did not look at her face, but at her reflection in the polished shield offered to him by Athena – thus he escaped her deadly gaze. For Kracauer it is precisely the film screen that acts as a polished protective shield, and is at the same time a method of *inducing the spectator to behead the horror it mirrors*<sup>72</sup>.

*If you cannot destroy the enemy – destroy his reflection. The enemy is the mirror of our mistakes* – the protagonists of *Kung-fu* by Janusz Kijowski cry out to each other. Perhaps in these words lies part of the paradoxical truth about CMA films. For their makers, this was a reflection both sinister and intriguing. They had played a dangerous game – dangerous, given the fact that usually the realist view of the world was not accompanied by belief in an internal order of the world, which could be mirrored using the realistic method. Agnieszka Holland stated years later: *Polish cinema was established in anger. We were awfully disgusted with the times, with what was going on around us, not just because of the attitude of the authorities, about which none of my generation and friends had any illusions, but the fact that people just let themselves be so sovietised. The paradox lies in the fact that we were making films that kicked the current situation in the guts, and we were allowed to continue making them*<sup>73</sup>.

Kracauer, ending his mythical tale, recalled that *Perseus, the image watcher, did not succeed in laying the ghost for good*<sup>74</sup>. The terrible gaze of Medusa comes back to us thus in fragments of cinematic reflection. It seems tamed, but in reality it has not lost its deadly power. For at one time it pierced us right through – coming at us from not just the screen. Perhaps that is why (among other things) CMA films are still worth watching, watching carefully and critically.

MARCIN MARON

Translated by KATARZYNA KRZYŻAGÓRSKA-PISAREK

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter I will use the abbreviation CMA.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly in the reflection on literature, but these issues can also be related to cinema.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Mitosek, *Realizm*, in: *Słownik literatury polskiej*, ed. A. Brodzka, M. Puchalska, M. Semczuk, A. Sobolewska, E. Szary-Matywiecka, Wrocław 1993, pp. 916-917.

<sup>4</sup> T. Miczka, “Kino moralnego niepokoju”. *Źródła i granice realizmu w polskim filmie fabularnym w latach 1976-1981*, in: *Sztuka czy rzemiosło? Nauczyć Polski i polskiego*, ed. A. Achtelek, J. Tambor, Katowice 2007, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 194.

<sup>7</sup> See S. Jaworski, *Realizm*, in: *Podręczny słownik terminów literackich*, Kraków 2007, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted after: S. Zawisliński, *Kieślowski. Życie po życiu. Pamięć*, Warszawa 2007, p. 289.

<sup>9</sup> A. Holland, “Kino” 1978, no. 7 (editorial survey).

<sup>10</sup> F. Falk, in: *Razem czy osobno?* Maciej Zaleski’s interview with Feliks Falk, “Kino” 1981, no. 7.

<sup>11</sup> As writes D. Dabert: *The main imperative of this cinema was truth; this is why the poetics of these films was so closely linked with ethics*, D. Dabert, *Kino moralnego niepokoju. Wokół wybranych problemów poetyki i etyki*, Poznań 2003, p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> See A. Friszke, *Kryzys „Nowej umowy społecznej”*. *Narodziny kultury niezależnej (lata 1976-1980)*, in: *idem, Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 256-274.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kijowski, *Dziennik*, vol. II, Kraków 1998, p. 394.

<sup>14</sup> As stated by Mariola Jankun-Dopart, the common ground between the new film movement

- (which the author defines not as CMA, but as the “cinema of distrust”) and Young Culture was: *A return to reality and shared experience, understanding art as an operation on the concrete, defining the artist's social role in terms of common experience, democratism, the desire to clearly identify moral contradictions and (...) psychology of liberation, of release, so cathartic.* M. Jankun-Dopart, *Falszywa inicjacja bohatera. Młode kino lat siedemdziesiątych wobec założeń programowych Młodej Kultury*, in: *Człowiek z ekranu. Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, ed. M. Jankun-Dopart, M. Przyłipiak, Kraków 1996, p. 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibidem, p. 94.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.
- <sup>18</sup> See T. Lubelski, *Historia kina polskiego. Twórcy, filmy, konteksty*, Chorzów 2009, p. 379.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 378. From the films listed by Lubelski in the “canonical” group, I omit in my analysis the films by Tomasz Zygadło (*Rebus*, 1977 and *Ćma /The Moth/*, 1980) and *Klinch* (*Clinch*, 1979) by Piotr Andrejew, as works crossing the boundaries of realism, as well as the film *Bez miłości* (*Without Love*, 1980) by Barbara Sass.
- <sup>20</sup> M. Dopart, op. cit., p. 99.
- <sup>21</sup> M. Kornatowska, *Wodzireje i amatorzy*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 107-108.
- <sup>22</sup> T. Miczka, op. cit., p. 198.
- <sup>23</sup> This is the setting: “in the long shot” (urban reality, provincial world, image of abroad), and “space in close-up” (“official” places, “unofficial” places, private space), see D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 130-141.
- <sup>24</sup> See e.g. M. Kornatowska, op. cit., p. 192.
- <sup>25</sup> See T. Lubelski, op. cit., pp. 369-374.
- <sup>26</sup> A. Holland, *Blisko życia*, “Kino” 1978, no. 1.
- <sup>27</sup> K. Kieślowski, *Funkcje filmu w telewizji i w kinie*, ibidem.
- <sup>28</sup> In addition to the above mentioned cinematographers, also others of course had contributed to the development of the movement. Firstly Witold Stok should be mentioned (maker of documentary films and cinematographer in such works as *Przepraszam, czy tu biją /Foul play or Excuse Me, Is It Here They Beat Up People?*, 1976/ by Marek Piwowski, and *Personnel* by Kieślowski), Jacek Zygadło (*The Moth*), Krzysztof Pakulski (*Przypadek /Blind Chancel, Krótki dzień pracy. Widok z okna /Short Working Day. The View from the Window/*, both directed by Krzysztof Kieślowski – released after the establishment of martial law in Poland) and Wiesław Zdort, cinematographer of the older generation, in the films similar to the CMA movement: *Paciorki jednego różańca* (*The Beads of One Rosary*, 1979, released in 1980) by Kazimierz Kutz, and *Without Love* by Barbara Sass.
- <sup>29</sup> K. Mętrak, *O czym mówi Dyrygent?* “Kino” 1980, no. 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>32</sup> G. Deleuze, *Cinema II*, transl. H. Tomlinson, R. Galeta, The Athlone Press, London 2005, p. 69.
- <sup>33</sup> Kłosiński at that time of course also shot *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*) and, among others, films such as *Panny z wilka* (*The Maids of Wilko*) by Andrzej Wajda.
- <sup>34</sup> *Nie wystawać zza kamery*, Marcin Giżycki's interview with Edward Kłosiński, “Kino” 1978, no. 12.
- <sup>35</sup> K. Zanussi, in: *Spróbujmy określić styl...*, an editorial discussion, “Kino” 1980, no. 8.
- <sup>36</sup> E. Kłosiński, ibidem.
- <sup>37</sup> Quoted in: M. Hendrykowski, *Sztuka reżyserii: rozmowa z Agnieszką Holland*, in: *Debiuty polskiego kina*, ed. M. Hendrykowski, Konin 1998, pp. 249-250.
- <sup>38</sup> See M. Jankun-Dopart, *Gorzkie kino Agnieszki Holland*, Gdańsk 2000, p. 119.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibidem, pp. 136-137.
- <sup>40</sup> Interestingly, the subsequent films by Holland – *Gorączka* (*Fever*, 1980, released in 1981) and *Kobieta samotna* (*A Woman Alone or A Lonely Woman*, 1981, released in 1987) were based on literary adaptation (the former) and predatory realism with elements of naturalism and the grotesque (particularly the latter).
- <sup>41</sup> A. Holland, in: S. Zawiśliński, op. cit., p. 164. We must also add that even in 1981 Kieślowski had not completely given up his extremely realistic descriptive method of filming, as evidenced by a TV film parallel to *Blind Chance*, about the 1976 events in Radom called *Short Working Day. The View from the Window*. This little-known film (shot by Krzysztof Pakulski, released in 1996!) re-enacted the events of the Radom protests from a specific perspective – the office window of the Secretary of the Communist Party, trapped by the workers in a provincial committee. The paradocumentary form of staging contained interwoven internal monologues of the main hero, as well as short flashbacks and anticipations of political events that preceded and followed the events in Radom.
- <sup>42</sup> M. Kornatowska, op. cit., p. 204.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibidem, p. 115.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

- <sup>45</sup> W. Wertenstein, *Przyjaźń trudna jak życie*, "Kino" 1979, no. 12.
- <sup>46</sup> It is also a fact that a certain standardization of visual means resulting from the adoption of a common realist strategy led shortly to the exhaustion of these means and to their repetitiveness, mostly visible in less successful works and films made after 1981, in the CMA manner.
- <sup>47</sup> See Z. Mitosek, op. cit., p. 916.
- <sup>48</sup> K. Zanussi, in: *Spróbujmy określić styl*, op. cit.
- <sup>49</sup> R. Ingarden, *Wykłady z etyki*, Warszawa 1989, p. 288.
- <sup>50</sup> For instance human rights were replaced with "the human right to live in peace", elections with "the act of support", freedom with "the social liberation", and morality with "the ethics of socialism", etc. See D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 172-173.
- <sup>51</sup> R. Ingarden, op. cit., p. 338.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 337.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>54</sup> A. Workowski, *Refleksje filozofa o kinie wartości*, in: *W stronę kiną filozoficznego. Antologia*, ed. U. Tes, Kraków 2011, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>55</sup> As writes D. Dabert, *films of the movement mostly used metonymy. Using elements of contemporary reality, they told little stories about great problems. One could say that the details containing the truth about the world here and now added up, and replacing large plans, created quite a coherent overall picture*. D. Dabert, op. cit., p. 84.
- <sup>56</sup> See G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, transl. A. Bostock, MIT Press, Cambridge 1971, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>57</sup> M. Głowiński, *Literatura wobec nowomowy*, in: idem, *Nowomowa i ciągi dalsze. Szkice dawne i nowe*, Kraków 2009, pp. 76, 77.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.
- <sup>60</sup> For example, it happens in the works of Stanisław Bareja, where the photographic concreteness in conjunction with the parody of newspeak is such an explosive mixture, disintegrating the spruced up and conventional – official – image of the PRL reality.
- <sup>61</sup> G. Lukács, op. cit., p. 90.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 79.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibidem, p. 65.
- <sup>64</sup> See M. Jankun-Dopart, *Falszywa inicjacja...* op. cit., p. 106.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 118.
- <sup>66</sup> G. Lukács, op. cit., p. 73.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibidem, pp. 73-74.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 152.
- <sup>71</sup> G. Lukács, *Art and Objective Truth*, in: "Writer and Critic" and other Essays, ed. and transl. A. Kahn, BackinPrint, Lincoln 2005, p. 52.
- <sup>72</sup> S. Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, Oxford University Press, New York 1960, p. 305.
- <sup>73</sup> A. Holland, quoted in D. Dabert, op. cit., pp. 20-21.
- <sup>74</sup> S. Kracauer, op. cit., p. 305.

# That Which is Absent

Accounts and memories of women  
from the Warsaw Uprising as ready-made  
but not used film scenarios

KAROLINA KOSIŃSKA

In Polish feature films dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising – and there are surprisingly few of these – there are no women. Of course the nurses, female liaison officers and civilians do appear but always only as seen, never seeing, always symbolic, and not full-blooded, always serving, and never independent and separate. In short, if they are protagonists (in dramatic not historical sense) they are the protagonists of somebody else's drama, not so much devoid of a voice as not allowed to use it. Their narratives, even or maybe above all the ordinary ones remain un-represented, hidden behind the great epic narratives of the heroes (this time in both senses).

Meanwhile there is vast literature regarding the fate of women in the Uprising – hundreds of collected or published memoirs and recorded accounts. These stories, dressed in more or less literary form are often very private but also military, civilian and heroic in character. They give insight in the rarely recognised sphere of the specificity of women's experience. This does not mean that the accounts of women constitute a certain reverse or are located on the antipodes of men's memories of the uprising. They simply open up a new plane, that complements the accounts of men. This area offers a hitherto unexplored point of view. For these who after several decades discover this "other" point of view the experience may prove overwhelming.

In the film *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki (Uprising in a Floral Blouse)*<sup>1</sup> presented on the website of the virtual Women's History Museum we can find the following narratives of women who participated in the Uprising: *I was dressed in everyday clothes, none of us prepared especially for the Uprising. There was no hygiene to speak of. I went to take part in the Uprising as to a ball. I had a white blouse, beloved cardigan, skirt, white socks and sandals. Washing yourself was not so important, more important was not to get shot by the Germans.* These are typical accounts in the context of what we can usually hear from those who survived. A moment later, however, a shocking sentence appears: *We did not have our periods. I simply think that this was caused by the negative emotions. From among my friends none had their periods so this made the situation easier for us.* And then: *Allegedly I helped to deliver a baby. Allegedly, because I was in a trance like state. I cannot remember it precisely.* And to conclude: *Freedom means to feel that you are on equal terms with the others.* These few sentences reveal not only the specificity of women's perspective of those days; they show also that there is a need to listen to these stories which until now have been barely audible. Stories which are private, focussed on the experience of everyday life (both combat and civilian),

these are “micro-narratives” or “micro-stories” which would help not so much to create a certain assessment of the Uprising but to bring us closer to the understanding of insurrectionary experience in literary and symbolic sense. The need then refers to replacing assessment with description, restoring the memories of the down-to-earth, and not limiting oneself to grand history.

This gap might be filled to a great extent with the memories of women. Communing with these memories we find a few recurring motifs perfectly enumerated in the quoted phrases from the film. Firstly, in the accounts of women from the Uprising you can sense great attachment to what is tangible and physical. Their descriptions of events are very vivid and literary. Secondly, we are struck by their “corporeality”, focus on what is physiological – this is what seems so incompatible with the canonical, “heroic” way of speaking about the Uprising. This “corporeality” is down-to-earth and specifically female – it refers not only to simple hygiene but also to pregnancy, maternity, suspended menstruations and finally fear of rape. Thirdly, these memories are saturated with the sense of sisterhood, affinity with other women. And this is not a girlish affinity but a mature one resulting perhaps from the community of experiences, or awareness of finality, or extremity of experiences, as well as from the belief in the significance of performed role. Reading these memories allows us to think that girls and women at the time were in the first place “for each other” and not “for the boys” they served. In accounts of fighting women dominates the need for freedom which *means that you feel that you are on equal terms with the others*. In these stories women’s experience is not ancillary to the men’s experience (even if the nurses or liaison officers write or speak mostly about how they took care of the insurgents) – it had the same weight and at the same time, a specific trait being the consequence of sisterly affinity.

Still the films dedicated to the Uprising dictate a completely different vision of the role of women in those events. It is worth looking at four pictures, two of which to a great extent established and institutionalised the way of speaking about the Uprising of 1944. These are: *Canal (Kanal)* by Andrzej Wajda (1956), *The Columbuses (Kolumbowie)* by Janusz Morgenstern (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> episode, 1970). I would also like to point to the rather non-standard *The Stone Sky (Kamienne niebo)* by Ewa and Czesław Petelski (1959) and emblematic (even though unsuccessful) film by Morgenstern “*W*” *Hour (Godzina “W”)*, 1979). In all of them female protagonists seem strongly sketched but in the end the power of these images proves deceptive.

The most characteristic female figures in these films are the liaison officers: Stokrotka (Teresa Izewska) and Halinka (Teresa Berezowska) from *Canal* and nurse Niteczka (Alicja Jachiewicz) from *The Columbuses*. The first is the provocative blond beauty who in the words of Jacek “Korab” (Tadeusz Janczar): *can’t let anybody get away*. Anybody means no man. Thanks to her short conversation with Korab we learn little about Stokrotka but precisely enough to define her in relation to the insurgent and enough to notice that in the first place she is a sex figure. She does not care about conventions, she has a foul tongue, sunbaths naked, “smiles” to boys and commanders thanks to which she can get rationed cigarettes and English tea. Stokrotka reacts to Korab’s allusions to her conduct with the words: *clearly this is who I am and there is nothing I can do about it*, and then puts on lipstick (this act remains in a meaningful symmetry with Korab’s shaving in front of the

same mirror). However the girl's alleged dissolution is eliminated by the confession that she came back there from the city centre ("there" means the place without hope, where they will kill us) solely for Jacek, because she is *his liaison officer*. Once Stokrotka goes with Korab down to the sewers and decides to stay with him to the very end her true nature reveals itself and in the first place this is devotion and complete dedication.

Halinka seems the opposite of Stokrotka. Dark, dressed in too big a uniform, shy, quiet and subserviently in love with lieutenant Mądry (Emil Karewicz). This love marks all her actions. So once in the sewer it appears that her beloved lied to her, not mentioning the fact that he had a wife for whom he wanted to live, Halinka loses her meaning of life and commits a suicide. This difference of attitudes of liaison officers from *Canal* however is only superficial. For both of them the value of existence lies in love – final and faithful. They live for it and without it they die. In a similar light the death of the protagonist of *The Columbuses*, nurse Niteczka, who is raped and murdered by Germans is presented. When the German patrol finds her together with the wounded Columbus (Jerzy Matalowski) in a ruined basement, the girl understands what will happen and leaves the basement so the boy she is in love with does not have to look at the rape.

In all these cases women live "for the boys", protecting them, taking care of them, without regard for themselves and their own suffering. The lesser importance of their experiences is highlighted in the very narrative of the films. None of them functions in the picture independently; they are never "on their own in the frame." Stokrotka always exists in the context of Korab, Halinka in the context of Mądry. Niteczka on the other hand in the most dramatic moment is completely eliminated from the frame. When the girl leaves with the Germans, the camera remains with Columbus, downstairs. Of course leaving with Niteczka and watching the tortures performed on her by the Germans (presumably multiple rape is completed by a rape with a broken bottle) would be unbearable for the spectators. However, the point is not the question of the use of drastic images in order to truly present the experiences of women, but the fact that by remaining with Columbus, the spectator has to reduce and limit Niteczka's tragedy to the tragedy of the insurgent. The rape on the girl is not horrible because of the girl herself – rather her suffering it presented through the suffering of Columbus who cannot help her. Here, in the basement, experienced torture has a "leading" role in relation to the helplessness of a man. Woman's torture, hidden, impossible to show, naturally remains "supporting." Niteczka's pain, paradoxically, remains in a way servile towards the helplessness (and therefore also humiliation) of man.

Watching this scene we might get the impression – and I hope it is not only women's – that the removal of woman's experience beyond the frame is a kind of concealment. The spectator is made aware that the woman is a victim but she herself has no voice. Her experience is hidden and remains silent. When Halinka decides to commit suicide she asks Mądry to turn off the torch. Death takes place in the darkness. This pattern keeps coming back: only when the spectator feels that soon they will see female experience, the narrative "withdraws." Female protagonists of *Canal* and *Columbuses* remain symbolic figures sentenced to silence and service to men, narrative, myth. Even if – as Stokrotka – they are truly leading characters.

Such a pattern can be found also in the “*W*” *Hour*<sup>2</sup>. Teresa (Ewa Błaszczyk) seems the protagonist of the film – she informs the insurgents about the date set for the Uprising, literary thanks to her the mobilisation takes place. But the girl does not think solely about the Uprising. She knows that she is pregnant with Czarny (Jerzy Gudejko), the unit commander. She does not tell him about it – she confesses to another woman. And again: the moment of their short conversation reveals the door to women’s experience. But again this door is quickly shut and we hear no more about Teresa’s pregnancy. The woman’s dramatic situation is pushed out to the closed, women’s world which – as the film suggests – does not belong in the world of the Uprising.

In this sense women’s experience remains untold – in the best case scenario it is barely signalled. It appears not in the basic fabric of the narrative but in its cracks which the spectators may notice but are not allowed to see what reality and type of experience the cracks might open onto.

This is the situation of all women involved directly in the struggle. But together with the tragedy of the fighters the fate of civilians was decided. The civilians, in films about the Uprising, perform solely the role of a crowd whose moods – enthusiasm and later despair – constitute the background for the actions of the fighters. Of course this situation is a result of the post-war propaganda. One of very few films which focuses directly on the experiences of civilians is *The Stone Sky* by Ewa and Czesław Petelski. In the theatre-like drama, we see a small group of people buried in the basement of a bombarded building. Among the “prisoners” there are two men: con man and petty thief Maniuś (Tadeusz Łomnicki), old, distinguished professor (Henryk Borowski) and women: caretaker Safianowa (Jadwiga Chojnacka), Hanka (Barbara Horawianka) with a daughter and a brunette Ewa (Zofia Słaboszanka). Closed in a stuffy, small room, hungry and dirty protagonists of *The Stone Sky* slowly start to lose hope for rescue, they get closer and closer to despair and madness. Their fate seems a meaningful metaphor of the fate of Warsaw’s entire civilian population during the Uprising, individual characters are representatives of individual groups of the city. And here for the first time appears the untold tragedy of mothers who “robbed of” their husbands have to provide safety and calm down their terrified children, the tragedy of older women who cannot deal with the horrible situation or of girls who try to maintain their youth and vitality in the situation of constant, terrifying threat to their lives. Also here for the first time appear relations between the women, a spark showing the community of their experience, not always easy or conflict-free. Ewa, who in these exceptional circumstances enters a relationship with Maniuś, is more vivid not as his lover but as a woman who places herself in the situation of other women. Her corporeality, even though strongly sexualised, has another dimension – we could say a more autonomous one, revealing itself not in the relation with a man but with other women and her own body. These women want to survive, physiologically, they have to feed their bodies with something, they sweat, they are dirty and down-to-earth.

They stop being “women in relation to men” and simply become people in a borderline situation. In the stuffy heat they undress to their underwear. But while Stokrotka from *Canal*, forcing her way through the filth in her black slip, even in this moment is shown as above all a sensual creature, women from *The Stone Sky* are devoid of this sensuality.

Exceptionality of the film by Petelskis reveals a certain problem of the Polish cinema – it fails at describing the experiences of civilians. Insurgents from *Canal* or *Columbuses* cannot answer the requests and complaints of the population of Warsaw. In both films the insurgents and residents of the city are separated and in critical moments antagonised. In this context the scene from the “*W*” *Hour* in which a mother of one of the insurgents despairs in fear of the havoc that the struggle might cause after a wounded friend of her son is brought to her apartment seems emblematic. Her son acknowledges it with words: *Be quiet! You do not understand!* Mother – a woman and a civilian – cannot grasp the call of higher duty. It is difficult to find a more telling indication of a woman’s place who – even though she remains on the battlefield – does not fight. Of course the propaganda of the communist Poland forced the creators to antagonise the civilians and insurgents precisely in this way, and present the insurgents in accordance with the right ideological pattern. And yet the scene shows one more dimension of how the insurgents’ battle was presented on the screen – it shows the division dictated by gender.

This difficulty which the Polish cinema encounters when trying to talk about civilians in the Uprising is characteristic not only for the realm of film. It is enough to recall the consternation caused by the publication of the controversial (even though by now a classic) work, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising (Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego)* by Miron Białoszewski<sup>3</sup>. This text aroused radical opposition from some of the critics and led to heated discussions. The subject of the discussion was not so much the specific language of Białoszewski but rather its inadequacy or inappropriateness when used in reference to the Warsaw Uprising. Matter-of-fact, ordinary, “civilian nature” of the language did not correspond to the seriousness and dignity of the event. So the reaction did not deal with the literary aspect of *A Memoir...* but with what was appropriate, fit and even moral. The work by Białoszewski, its tone and material, did not fit the myth, the official canon of speaking about the Uprising (even in the times when the Uprising itself was a topic that was subject to censorship). Białoszewski presented the reality of that time outside the discourse of the heroic and the glory; through the style and content of the text he demythologised the Uprising. This demythologisation took place not through discrediting the actions and attitudes of the insurgents but through shifting the point of view towards the area of the “civilian nature” and privacy. This on the other hand caused a shift from the area of myth to the area of physicality and corporeality of the insurrectionary reality. Insurrectionary because related to the time and place of the Uprising and not the fight as such.

*And maybe it is possible? Because they say it is not. To tell. What one experienced. That is – what happened. Meanwhile we know it all only from stories (descriptions) and pictures. We even know twice as much. Because we know about everything that did not happen because it was invented by those who attribute the reality with a certain inconvenience or inefficiency. – I do not do it*<sup>4</sup>. In this author’s commentary the declaration of the writer’s attitude to the object of description (that is what can be called reality) and his artistic method is simultaneously revealed. This attitude is expressed in the radical attachment to the most basic elements of this object: to events, situations, visible images of things which are involved in the events. What is more, Białoszewski is not trying to fit the reality into a myth, into a historiosophic metaphor that would organise the work on the text, the selection

of material and its, let's say, modelling. Even if a metaphor finally emerges, it is something derivative of the fragmentary nature of the description devoid of a thesis. Of course Białoszewski does not conceal that *A Memoir* is literature bound in a convention. Nonetheless this is simply a diary, and therefore it is an attempt to faithfully record what we experienced; it is only an attempt, as the author is fully aware of the unavoidable mediation (whereas we know it all only from stories (descriptions) and pictures). But what matters here is not the faithfulness but the method or rather intention – about the fact that Białoszewski does not attribute the reality with inefficiency, that he relies on it, remembering at the same time that when talking about it he is in fact talking about his memory. Consequently – he gives up building a great metaphor and agrees to the fragmentary nature of his narrative, in a way placing it closer to “life.”

Maria Janion in her essay *Wojna i forma (War and Form)* on the one hand conducts an exhaustive and thorough analysis of Białoszewski's text and on the other mercilessly deals with the critics who discredited such an achievement as *A Memoir*. When writing about the “system” of the entire Polish literature and “anti-systems” formed within it she concludes: *Basic tension within the system and the anti-systems was set by the most important for the Polish literature as a whole opposition between “the official” and “the private”, between “the bard” and “the artist”, between “the fight” and “social service” and the Cause and internal matters and experiences of an individual* <sup>5</sup>. She notes how quickly the binding canon where the “military”, “heroic” and “bright” was superior to the “civilian”, “ordinary” and “down-to-earth” <sup>6</sup> was acknowledged. She associated this special system with a literary pattern that she calls Tyrtaeon, rhetorical and military emphasising at the same time how easily such a pattern slides towards banality, empty form, inadequate in the task of grasping the reality. In the chapter *Ich nieprzeżycie wojny? (Their not-experiencing of war?)* Janion recalls the words of Michał Komar: *The widespread and socially accepted knowledge about this period transformed itself almost beyond historical myth of the fight between Good and Evil, fight between the Darkness and the Light* <sup>7</sup>. Following this trait and adopting Komar's division into “myth” and “concretum” the researcher concludes: *In Polish social awareness and in Polish prose connected by bonds of mutual projections, the myth devoured the concretum, the myth defends itself against the concretum that poses for it the greatest threat since it contains the irresistible truth of the detail, experience and memory – not yet mystified, not yet set in the safe and easy shape of a collective cliché* <sup>8</sup>. This concretum constitutes the value of “civilian”, down-to-earth and a-heroic (not anti-heroic) narration. It is connected with the phenomenological approach to reality (according to Janion, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Alain Robbe-Grillote, phenomenological prose treats the world as what we see and not what we think <sup>9</sup>), which does not give in to the dictate of myth creation. Białoszewski's prose describing the time of the Uprising would be a great example of such a method (and artistic attitude). This abandoning of the myth and not its denial has the strongest demythologising effect. Denial would inevitably lead to a new myth and would remain within the same system. And the point is to leave the system, and find a new way of speaking and imaging that is not antithetic. As Białoszewski says: *Well... The point is to deal with life as it happens. To demythologise. To “emetaphorise”* <sup>10</sup>.

Why in the context of a discussion of the lack of women's narrations in the Polish cinema am I referring to Białoszewski and what Maria Janion wrote about his *A Memoir*? Both the exceptionality of the method and attitude of the writer and the reflections of the researcher may have direct bearing on the question of (non)existence of women's "insurrectionary" narrations in the Polish film.

It seems that Polish films on the Uprising usually serve the myth and metaphor thus abandoning the civilian, private, concrete experience that creates the fabric of reality. They do not refer to what happened but to how we should evaluate it. Protagonists of these films are always worthy of a monument and the demythologisation of insurgents in *Canal* is solely superficial because it immediately suggests a new myth, one that due to its bitterness is even more heroic. *Canal* – the film that in the strongest way shaped the memory and image of the Uprising – again constitutes a generalisation that governs the organisation of the plot. It offers an evaluation of history but does not speak of what happened. Its value was, is and will remain unquestionable, however, it is difficult to fight the impression that the power of this film was crucial in maintaining the canon of speaking about the Uprising. And deviating away from the canon it is still controversial. And again: the deviation does not have to mean formulation of another evaluation of the August uprising but moving to a completely different area (or level) of observation. That is it would mean moving from the heroic to the civilian. And in consequence, a move from "top-down" to "grass-roots" level, and so a move from the subordination of events to a certain vision of them, to the extraction of the vision from the events, micro-narrations and "micro-histories." The term – "micro-history" – as formulated by Kazimierz Wyka and referred to by Maria Janion is of crucial meaning here, since "micro-history" *is composed of fragments of real life not yet falsified by ideas, conventions, myths, clichés and stereotypes*<sup>11</sup>. Wyka finds it *more difficult to remember than the great history because it does not give in to patterns*<sup>12</sup>. It remains in the sphere of the concrete events and experience of reality and not its interpretation.

The majority of memories of those who fought and lived in Warsaw in August and September 1944 is in this sphere. Among them women's accounts have a special power – firstly because they often abandon the canonical tone and monumentality and secondly, because they reveal experiences absent or omitted in the official canon. What's interesting in its so often literary and fragmentary nature is the fact that women's micro-narrations become controversial and subversive. Just as the prose of Białoszewski. When the women who fought in the Uprising start talking about themselves, about being for other girls and among them, about the corporeality (and not necessarily sexuality) of experiences the listener may feel that a blind is being removed.

It does not mean, however, that men's narrations are separated by some inerasable difference from the women's or that men's stories automatically inscribe themselves in the "official" tone and women's always break out of it. A paradox sneaks in here: even though experiences of women and men differ significantly, at the same time they appear to be similar. On the one hand women fighting in the Uprising performed the roles appropriate for women; they were liaison officers and nurses, they took care of the cooking and provisions and did all the work "supporting" the actions of insurgents. They had to abandon the

pre-war status of girls from good families and yet sometimes take advantage of it to protect themselves and others. Moreover women in those days were forced to deal with their physiology in inhuman conditions, they were exposed to rape, they had to give birth to and protect their children. On the other hand, fighting women could feel that they had a great responsibility, that they were co-fighters. Accounts from this “area” of the struggle constitute an equally important record to the men’s even though one inevitably different. What is interesting, in the memories of women, is the ambivalence characteristic for the marginalised in their views about the canonic. Uncertainty and ambiguity often appear as well as the conviction that the experience has to be individual, that between what is black and white hide many shades of grey. This ambivalence shatters the impeccability of the monumental image of the Uprising, but at the same time it does not deny the obligation to remember. It brings this memory down to earth. Stories of women answer the question “how was it?” and not “what for?” or “was it worth it?”

Accounts that I will refer to are usually “non-literary” even if the authors tried to dress their memories in the most literary shape. These often published (or written with intention that one day they would be published) texts may be treated as amateur literature. Or as literature grounded in life and distant from myth, coming from personal experience and not the need to evaluate or pose a thesis that the content and form of the account are subject to.

I will use materials that were both published and unpublished. Among the first the most important are the memories of girl-scouts from the 31<sup>st</sup> Warsaw Girl Scout Team (Warszawska Drużyna Harcerek) recruited mostly from pupils of the Jan Kochanowski Female Junior Secondary School in Warsaw<sup>13</sup>. An important source for me are also the interviews conducted within the project *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki. Życie codzienne kobiet w czasie Powstania Warszawskiego* (*Uprising in a floral blouse. Everyday life of women at the time of the Warsaw Uprising*) completed by Feminoteka with the participants of the Uprising and women who at that time were in Warsaw. I will also refer to two books published by PIW in varsavianistic series Biblioteka Syrenki: *Pełnić służbę... Z pamiętników i wspomnień harcerek Warszawy 1939-1945* (*To be on Duty... From the Memoirs of the Warsaw Girl Scouts 1939-1945*)<sup>14</sup> and *W Alejach spacerują “Tygrysy”. Sierpień – wrzesień 1944* (*The “Tigers” are taking a walk in Aleje. August – September 1944*) by Elżbieta Ostrowska (also a member of the 31 WDH)<sup>15</sup>. I also found a special collection of texts in the publication *Życie w powstańczej Warszawie* (*Life in the Uprising Warsaw*)<sup>16</sup>. These are accounts collected as early as August 1944 by Edward Serwański within the action “Iskra-Dog”. Serwański, who at the beginning of August was taken away together with other civilians to Pruszków, escaped from the train station there to Brwinów where he decided to gather testimonies of those who escaped or were taken away from the capital city<sup>17</sup>. The incredible value of these testimonies consists in the fact that they are not memories, but accounts made “live” and mostly by civilians. They offer access to the area of experiences which is missing from the accounts of participants of the Uprising written post factum. Various scenarios described – fragmentary memories, vivid, autonomous, rooted in the concretum – constitute almost ready-made but still not used film scenarios.

**Women for women, women among women**

*I had a real sergeant, do you know what a sergeant is? This is a primitive chap who speaks in a deep voice and gives orders. This one had to drill the girls and this was terrible for him and what is more he drilled these girls in a living room with a carpet. He could not shout because it was occupation so he made these noises, kind of grunting. We learnt the language, this: ouou turn to the left, ouou turn to the right, and it was idiotic. We did everything and since as I told you I was left-handed when he said "turn to the right" I turned left. It was horrible for him, I was actually quite good, I was very good at assembling and disassembling a VIS. This is not such a big thing since it is just a mincer. I did it very quickly so he actually liked me but for these mistakes during drills I had to crawl around the living room. And crawling is terribly unaesthetic for a woman because you crawl on your elbows and toes and since our breasts and asses were growing it was terrible, so I said: "I won't." And he got really angry: "The punishment for disobedience is execution." So I said: "so shoot." Later he wanted to smooth things out and sent a senior private to me. I told him that I would not be in the army because it seemed stupid, this turn to the right, turn to the left, it was not serious<sup>18</sup>. This is how Barbara Strynkiewicz-Żuromska, alias Romka, remembers her first "military" experiences. This fragment renders really well the specificity of the situation of women who wanted to participate in the military fight. On the one hand they joined the military service and were to be treated like soldiers; on the other those who were to train them sometimes had trouble with seeing women-fighters as their equals. And the girls themselves could not always forget what is aesthetic and what is not, and the specific ethos of a girl from a good family. However the situation described probably took place before the Uprising. Probably after its beginning majority of these problems ceased to be significant. But still naturally, due to the division of functions during the Uprising, experiences of women and men remained fundamentally different even if strongly connected. The line sketched so strongly between the world of women and of men was not totally abolished. Being a nurse or a liaison officer is a completely different area of action than open fight with a weapon (or without it) usually reserved for men. Girls thrown into the clearly defined insurrectionary reality of women's platoons of liaison and nursery services, additionally going through this unknown to boys symbolic, even though really physical, "growing of breasts and asses" in a natural way created a kind of community, community of surviving (and experiencing) the Uprising. A community in which the sense of dependency on the insurgents faded away in the face of equality or dependency on other women. Isolation of insurrectionary women fighters created a special situation of incredible dramatic potential.*

**Nurses**

An emblematic example of such an existence of women for and among women is the story of the scouts-nurses who in July 1944 made a military oath of the Home Army at the house of Doctor Irena Semadeni-Konopacka, alias Konstancja. This extraordinary doctor was to become not only their guardian and mentor but also companion of insurrectionary drama. The scouts were assigned as line sanitary pa-



*Canal*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1956)



*Canal*, dir. Andrzej Wajda (1956)

trol to the 5th grouping of the Home Army and initially were stationed in the building of the Social Insurance Institution at the corner of Czerniakowska and Rozbrat streets. This patrol included: Janina Bem (after her husband Dymecka) – alias Nina, Bogna Chawałkiewicz – alias Bogda, Janina Chmielińska – alias Chmiel, Danuta Remiszewska – alias Remi, Zofia Rusiecka (after her husband Kreowska) – alias Zocha, Halina Wilczyńska – alias Wilk, Henryka Żukowska – alias Żuk, Adela Bubełło – alias Ada. All were 16-17 years old. Since 16 August this patrol constituted the team of a field hospital managed by Doctor Konstancja (this hospital was under the command of Cpt. Kryska /Zygmunt Netzer/). In the memories written down in 1986 by the scouts of 31 WDH we can find accounts of three girls who belonged to this group: Bem-Dymecka, Rusiecka-Kreowska and Chmielińska. The authors also used recorded memories of Doctor Semadeni-Konopacka (she died in 1984). The participants of the Uprising when describing their experiences focussed mostly on the person of Doctor Konstancja.

These three accounts, so strongly intertwined with each other make a huge impression. In the first place because all of them refer to the same events seen from different perspectives. Stories of these women intertwine just as if the narrative was told from a number of cameras. When Zocha remembers that at a certain moment she hears Chmiel shout: *I can't see, my eyes are burnt*, in the account of Chmiel we read: *I could not open my eyes. Flame touched my eyebrows and eyelashes. Some sticky fluid on my face... Zocha who was close to me run to me and violently and categorically demanded that I pulled myself together and opened my eyes*. When Chmiel writes that Nina was injured, Nina describes how she felt pain and Zocha pulled her down by her feet to the basement. This story conducted from three perspectives sometimes becomes stratified: Nina lies in hospital, unconscious; Chmiel and Zocha face the choice: stay with the injured or go across the Vistula or through the sewers to Mokotów. They decide to stay. In the morning Germans come and tell them to leave the improvised hospital. Nina, lying among the others tells what happened in the basement: *A German asked who she was and what was there. She replied she was a doctor and that in the basements there were only civilians. The Germans went to the next basement (...). A German asked whether they were also civilians. Dr Konstancja answered that in the basements there were many persons she did not know but most of them were civilians. The German approached a selected injured person and asked him if he was a civilian. The injured in fluent German answered that they were all bandits, partisans and that he was a German from Silesia who was forced to participate in the actions. The German officer told Doctor Konstancja to write down in German all the testimony of the Silesian. Since she said she could not understand he started writing it all down by himself. He wrote two pages of testimony, put on white gloves, took out his gun and shot the Silesian first. Later he shot one person after another and asked Doctor Konstancja to confirm their death. Even though he was shooting from a short distance not all the injured were dead, some of them still lived. Dr Konstancja in every case said that the person was dead. In other basements the situation repeated itself. In the basement where I was lying a woman was shot, a young boy too and I was kicked with a shoe and my watch was taken but they did not shoot me. Despite being injured and allegedly in poor condition I was aware of the shooting in other basements*. Meanwhile Chmiel, standing with Zocha outside in a crowd of persons

gathered there describes the following event: *We were welcomed by blinding sun, crowd and a big group of Germans. They were SS and Vlasov army officers. There were the dead bodies of the shot. The Germans let the women and children go and a group of young people stood on a side. The Germans shouted "Partisanten, Banditen."* At a certain point a girl dressed in German leopard-print army camouflage jacket came out of the basement. Her appearance infuriated the Germans. One German slapped her, she fell, kneeled in front of the Germans and started to beg "Don't kill me!" With Żuk and Urszula we held each other's hands tightly. We stood by the group of young people directed there by the Germans. Meanwhile the German kicked the begging girl in the stomach and fired at her stomach. She was probably the liaison officer who came to us from the Old Town. This started further killing of the young. This way they shot around 40 persons. People lied 3-5 metres from us. We saw that they were still alive, that they would be dying for the next few hours. We stood there waiting for our turn. Thoughts crossed our head – will it hurt? – we must remember to shout "Poland has not yet perished..."

This three-way narrative dominated by factual descriptions of situations seems a live material for a scenario. The story told, due to the proximity of the three narrators, is on one hand very focussed and "local" and on the other gains features of universalism. In the girls' accounts we can also find descriptions of rescue actions (*We were rescuing a boy crushed by beams, the pulse was dropping, together with Zocha or Wilk the two of us struggled to take off his clothes, in the end I "shot" the shot through his clothes and this probably saved him when later with difficulty we managed to get him out*), and social situations (*Next to us at Czerniakowska Street there were warehouses of "Spotem" thanks to which for some time we had sugar, marmalade, sago, tomato puree. When the second warehouse was bombarded every one of us took a few sets of underwear so we could at least try to stay clean*), and account of the girls' trip from Czerniaków to the City Centre to deliver a few reports and inform the families that they were alive. Maintaining individualised, focussed perspective allows them to create precision and brevity in depicting what was around; precision and brevity which – again – lead towards the concretum and away from generalisations. Generalisation appears only at the end in a way "in the spectator's eye." But it is not to be found as an element of design or evaluation.

In accounts of the three scouts one more thing attracts attention: the sense of sisterhood, affinity between the women in a particularly difficult situation: they are in a way between the insurgents and the civilians and they have to bear all the consequences. Their guardian and authority is Dr Konstancja. She stops being just a doctor – she becomes a commander whom you fully trust. Bem-Dymecka describes in detail the constant fight of Dr Semadeni-Konopacka for her hospital in which she decided to stay even though she had a chance to leave (Dr Konstancja stayed there even though her nine-year-old son was with her; her husband and older son died earlier in the Uprising). Situation in the hospital abandoned by the insurgents was hopeless: *Radosław organised briefing for persons who were staying during which Dr Konstancja asked from where she was supposed to get water and food. Radosław told her to go to the Germans and ask for food for the injured. (...) After Radosław left Dr Konstancja went through all the basements with the injured and took off their badges, hid camouflage jackets and other parts of German uniforms. The next day the Germans came and the above-described scenes took place.*

*Her subsequent efforts to save the injured arouse admiration and surprise. When the soldiers came with stretchers for the dead and injured, Dr Konstancja, disobeying the German commander, asked them not to take out those who had white handkerchiefs on their faces. When later the officers of Wehrmacht with an Austrian lieutenant came Dr Konstancja went to the lieutenant and in good German explained to him that those injured passed "the test of truth", that they were not soldiers but the German officer did not believe them and shot them from a close distance and yet they were still alive so God's punishment did not reach them. The lieutenant clearly liked this story because they helped her move the injured who survived. In the end she did actually go to the Germans to Solec Street and asked for food for her patients. She received coffee, bread and tinned spinach. She tried also to look for help among the delegates of the International Red Cross. Only thanks to her incredible determination she managed to evacuate the patients in the end. For entire October, thanks to a special pass, she looked for and gathered the injured around the entire city.*

Her person is in a way a tangent point of the recalled accounts just as she was during the Uprising. In the memories of the scouts we can read: *We did not expect then the deep experiences that would connect us with Dr Irena Semadeni and how lucky we were that such a person was our direct Authority during the fight – Chmielińska; I preferred to go to the unknown with Dr Konstancja than go to a military camp with others from the Home Army – Bem-Dymecka. The commanders could give orders but it was Dr Konstancja that was the true authority for the nurses.*

Similarly strong bonds, even though different, connected the girls themselves. The fact that after forty years they were still in touch alone proved the strength of these contacts. While the insurgents usually remained for them (at least in these accounts) anonymous soldiers that they were to rescue, for each other they were the closest family. Not all of them survived. In all the three accounts appears the figure of Danusia Remiszewska, alias Remi, who died on 16 August when running for the injured. Each scout remembers well her last hours: hesitation whether to go to the confession, her smile with which she proudly informed them, that she was being sent to a new hospital. Zocha writes: *We are released for the funeral. I have to get the flowers. In a garden on the corner of Rozbrat and Szara there are red carnations but are unavailable due to shootings. The gardener refuses to sell but allows us to take them. We managed – and with a bunch of these red carnations we say goodbye to Remi. Red, fragrant, autumn carnations always bring this funeral to my mind. And Chmiel adds: we still had a difficult task. We went with Nina to Tamka to the mother of our dead friend – Remi – Danka Remiszewska. Mrs Remiszewska looked at us with pain and a kind of reproach when Nina gave her the cross and scout belt of her daughter. Maybe this is one of the most representative stories illustrating the fate of the young scouts, nurses and liaison officers. It is closed by a touching epilogue: today a lock of Remi's hair is a part of the exposition at the Warsaw Uprising Museum.*

\* \* \*

Halina Gajewska, scout from the 31 WDH, on 1 August found herself together with a dozen of other nurses at the house of Prof. Mściwoj Semerau-Siemianowski

on Ochota, at Sucha Street (today Krzywickiego). She did not know the other girls, she only knew, thanks to a liaison officer who reached the professor's villa few hours before the hour "W" [time set for the outbreak of the Uprising], that all belonged to a group called "Dorota." They were to await further orders which never came. The Germans however did come but convinced by the professor that all the young women gathered at his house were just hiding from the shootings decided to "protect" the villa from the Warsaw "bandits." The girls and professor's family (his daughter, Bogna, was to command the group "Dorota") were locked in the house, bars on windows were fitted, curtains drawn. The situation was equally dramatic and absurd: a group of teenage nurses that hated German soldiers and were ready to fight against them together with the insurgents was considered by the Germans to be a group of scared girls who had to be protected from these insurgents. The situation was complicated further by the fact that at various nooks and crannies of the house, including the attic the professor hid a number of Polish fighters.

The girls were practically cut off from the world. During the first few days of August the phone was still working. So they expected the orders from the command to be sent this way. Unfortunately, the only news that came on the phone informed of the death of professor's two sons. Later the line was cut off. The only connection with the outside world were small holes made in the curtains – through them you could watch in secret what was happening in the street. Thanks to the observation they managed to establish that the Germans left duty for meals at very regular hours, they also managed to notice two lost insurgents who were asking for shelter. They were hiding in the garden for a few days. The girls helped them by handing over food and water at very specific hours. They could not help them, however, when the Germans caught them during escape and wounded one of them. The boy was dying all night moaning – this night none of the girls slept and they managed to maintain their psychic balance only thanks to a medicine the professor gave them. Also the need to maintain appropriate relations with the German guards proved to be a torture. When they asked that two of them served the soldiers by preparing meals, girls were in despair. Finally, for this unrewarding task *two ladies older than us by 5-10 years volunteered because they fared very badly on the modest food portions we had. They would come back late at night escorted by the soldiers and tell us, hungry, about the cutlets they had eaten. On the first day they even brought candies and gave them to us but I did not notice any of us eating them.*

When the Allies appeared over the city the Germans disappeared. A patrol of insurgents came to the hiding nurses, the insurgents hiding in the attic were taken out and the girls told to get ready to leave. However this did not happen: the guide who was to lead them did not come. Soon things incomprehensible for the girls started to happen: suddenly strange soldiers appeared in the area, causing panic among the Germans who soon hid in the basements.

Girls, just like the Germans, thought these were Russians. They noticed, however, that when leaving neighbouring houses they looked scruffy, their uniforms pulled with difficulty over the different things hidden underneath. *We concluded in surprise that these were probably robbers but we could not understand it at all.* When they came to the villa, the Germans jumped out of the basement and scared them away. These unknown soldiers as it turned out were from the Vlasov army, that is Ukrainian soldiers in German service. *We did not know then about the*



*The Columbuses*, dir Janusz Morgenstern (1970)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

*pogroms and rapes that took place in the houses the Ukrainians entered, we did not know – what an irony of fate – that probably the Germans saved our lives. The residents were told to abandon the house. Then the hell started, emotions suppressed until then exploded: All the girls disappeared from the room and screams came – as it appeared – from the kitchen. I went there and immediately left. The scene I saw made me feel nauseous. In one corner of the kitchen sat speechless cooks while on the table there were two big pots of lard which the girls ate by handfuls. It is true that our food rations for 23 days have been very modest and all of us were very hungry and that the professor's family ate separate meals but could we blame them for this? When they satisfied their hunger going through the wardrobes started, Bogna's dresses were taken out and distributed. I sat alone in the corner of the room and I felt terribly sorry. For a moment Bogna with her mother came to the room and immediately left. After some time professor's wife came to me and gave me Bogna's sweater, skate shoes and Leszek's linen shirt asking me to accept this gift. I started crying. Later on these things served me for 2-3 years.*

Gajewska's story is not a typical insurrectionary scenario. It sheds special light, however, on the situation of women in those times. If the Germans met these girls

“in action” probably they would have no mercy for them. However not knowing about their status they decided, – to the despair of the interested party – to take care of them and offer them specifically understood kindness. What is more, in a certain sense they saved their lives protecting them from the Vlasow army. Emotionally the girls had a very difficult task. Being determined fighters they could not rebel openly. This was accompanied by frustration related to being closed in the house and the futility of waiting. The final exit of the girls has no traits of liberation – frustration changed into fear: of rape, robbery and wandering.

The isolation of the girls, the secret kept from the Germans, the sense of hopelessness related to the inability to fight, the limitation of the contact with the outside world to the peepholes cut out in the curtains – creates a situation of a great dramatic potential. Gajewska saturates her story with details and what is most important her story is very matter-of-fact. It is as faithful as possible account of events and not a story burdened with interpretation. And still this no-nonsense account in the end changes into a metaphor not through the decision of the teller but through its own power or the power of the concretum. The hole in a curtain as the sole eye onto the world in the situation described has a powerful symbolic meaning.

### Liaison officers

In 2005 a book by Darek Foks and Zbigniew Libera *Co robi łączniczka (What the Female Liaison Officer is Doing)* <sup>19</sup> was published. Short stories included in this book always start in the same way: with a comparison of what the boys do with what the liaison officer does. So: *When boys come back in the morning, the female liaison officer sniffs. When boys go to burn a house, the female liaison officer walks across the square. When boys have a hangover, the female liaison officer sets off to the west.* The texts are accompanied by montages on which faces of beautiful actresses and sex symbols (Anita Ekberg, Catherine Deneuve, Louise Brooks, Sophia Loren, Monica Vitti) are placed on the photos of the participants of the Uprising. Sometimes the photos of liaison officers are fit into the frames of magazines “West”, “Picturegoer”, “Cahiers du cinéma”. Sometimes these are blurred, disturbing photos, referring to the Warsaw August of 1944. As the commentary by Jerzy Jarniewicz on the cover suggests, the project by Foks and Libera is supposed to refer to the memory, and examine this incestuous duo of word and image. Jarniewicz writes: *Memory in which words and images are stored, this old warehouse on the outskirts of the city does not belong to us. Visions that appear to us are already ready-made. Words that we will use to describe our house and our street have been ready for a long time* <sup>20</sup>. In this context the prose of Foks combined with photos by Libera direct the recipient towards the questions of myth – in this specific situation the myth that the Uprising itself and its participants have become. Or rather its female participants: liaison officers. They become the forms which have set in a very specific shape. The artists’ project however does not refer to, what is quite obvious, to the memory of women. It rather recalls the boys’ memory of these women. Not the boys of that time but of today whose borrowed memory in fact operates with these set shapes. For that reason in the frame cut out from *Canal* with Stokrotka by the crates at the sewer exit we can see the face of Anita Ekberg and on another photomontage a naked body of a woman with unrecognis-

able face. Two myths intertwine giving the image of the contemporary form of memory. This is truly a new way of speaking about the Uprising – there is no glorification, no words about glory or actions. What is revealed is the desire of corporeality, eroticism, circling around guesses what the liaison officer is doing when the insurgent thinks about her. Just as Korab wondered what Stokrotka was doing. And again, like in Wajda's work, the sensuality that is key in the creation of the model form of the liaison officer is highlighted. The protagonists of the montage photos by Libera, the half-fighters and half-stars are in the first place sexual figures.

This is a certain artistic choice. We can only point to its emblematic nature, to this repetition of the code established by Wajda's film, a way of thinking about the girls from the Uprising. So also today they are figures of sensuality, moved away from their function and everyday, often degrading work. Of course we can assume that such a radical emphasis on the sexuality of the girls from the Uprising denudes the absurdity of the myth. And still in the work of Foks and Libera it is difficult to find deconstruction, nor is this absurdity pointed out. In this case, liaison officers shown as sex symbols remain these sex symbols also today. We are dealing with fascination and not demythologisation. And so to maintain the balance it is worth looking at how those liaison officers considered each other, how their memory places itself, often creating a new heroic myth.

The book by Elżbieta Ostrowska is an incredibly valuable source about women from the liaison service. Ostrowska, alias Ela, commanded the Regional Message Centre "S," located in the basement of a tenement house at Al. Jerozolimskie 17. It was there that the famous or rather infamous "route of death" connected both parts of the City Centre. Ostrowska remained in the centre of the Uprising – in the geographical but also in combat meaning of the word. Through her unit went the most important reports and orders, it was her who sent liaison officers to the furthest areas of the capital city, who worried every time when one of the girls did not come back from the route, who worked out paths through the sewers, who was in touch with hundreds of civilians who got across under the barricade through Aleje. Ostrowska's account is on one hand detailed and on the other shows a broad panorama of the insurrectionary experience. She is cold and matter-of-fact but also subjective. We read memories of a commander and soldier who is also a young woman letting herself experience dramas taking place around her but also able to remain tough.

In this account it is characteristic that the author never tries to use the "status" of a woman even though she is aware of the difference. *We did not want it and we did not like it when the superiors treated us more as girls than as soldiers*<sup>21</sup>. It does not mean that she tries to assume a military, "male" tone. From her perspective women's service is something autonomous and relations between the liaison officers have crucial meaning. This sense of sisterhood, responsibility for each other constitutes the core of their insurrectionary work. When a liaison officer particularly close to her does not come back from the route for a disturbingly long time, Ela sets off to find her. She questions the civilians about girls they buried in the neighbourhood. Every fresh grave could be the grave of the one she was looking for. In one lies a nurse, in another a liaison officer, a blond with a bottle affixed to her hand containing sealed military ID and a letter to her mother. *The girl I was looking for was not a blonde. I go again to the cross with yesterday's date. I did not know the surname of patrol officer Jadwiga just as she did not know mine. I do not even*

know if “Jadwiga” is her first name or an alias. Am I standing at her grave? The description is a bit similar and this was the route she must have taken? (...) Among scattered rubbish, broken glass and burned papers, in a square ploughed away by a missile, among similar graves there is a small hill of ground covered in dust and rubble. “Liaison officer NN”<sup>22</sup>. This unknown liaison officer symbolises everyone from Ostrowska’s group. Even if the scenarios of lives of liaison officers remembered by Ostrowska differ, each of these stories, being an account of authentic events, grows into a symbol. Also this one in which a girl with a blond plait hiding in an entrance to a building in order to run across Aleje, does not notice the “tiger” and dies on her way and the only trace left of her is hanging from the window frame, *stuck there by the blast her plait – bright in bloody shreds*<sup>23</sup>. And the story of Wanda who asks Ela not to protect her just because she could be her mother. When running across a street Wanda falls down Ostrowska is convinced that the liaison officer was hit. *Suddenly she rises from the ground. Just as unexpectedly as she fell before. With a few leaps she goes across the part of the street separating her from an entrance door and disappears inside. (...) At night she came back to “Eska” with a bag full of orders*<sup>24</sup>.

Ostrowska offers also a detailed and precise account of crossing the sewers<sup>25</sup>. It took place when Mokotów yielded – a place colonel Karol had to reach matter what. Seeing the exhaustion of the sewer guides Ostrowska decided to lead the unit of the insurgents herself. She was accompanied by Marysia who also knew her way around the sewers. The description of this crossing even in a text so rich with suggestive details still surprises with its vividness. Every detail noticed and every sound was recorded by the author. As well as every thought that accompanied her on the way: when the patrol passes the escapees from Mokotów, when the route becomes especially dangerous, when they hear inhuman howling, when open manholes are watched by the Germans, when in the darkness they step on dead bodies whose faces they sometimes recognise. The real drama starts when soldiers, the unaware of the danger, fall into a trap: they go out through a manhole watched by the Germans. Grenades fall into the sewer, everybody panics and there is chaos. The narrative immediately adjusts to the terror of the situation. It becomes broken, hysterical, but still clear and self-aware. Ostrowska tries to reason rationally but more and more often clarity of mind is disturbed by phantoms, pieces of detached, insane thoughts: *Where am I?... – shivering body brings me around from a daze – this is a sewer, rainfall drainage in Mokotów! You cannot stand up, you cannot sit. Who will sit – will not stand up any more. Go, go... why is the right leg so stiff and numb? Am I wounded? My head is confused. There is buzzing in my head like my skull is about to explode. Cherry blossom, trees covered with white flowers. So many petals! They fall on my face, fall down as rain...*<sup>26</sup> Suddenly a madman comes out from the darkness: *somebody’s huge, strong hands stuck in my body as steel claws and movements were paralysed by a hollow murmur: – Stop! Stop or I’ll strangle you! (...) Who are you? Who?!*<sup>27</sup> The madman appears to be one of the soldiers from the unit. He is paralysed by fear, in despair he grabs the liaison officer afraid that she will run away leaving him behind. The route gets longer, the wanderers stumble often and the only thought in their heads is “do not fall.” Finally unexpected rescue appears – one of the liaison officers learned that the guide and a soldier were left down there. When the help comes to the lost, *the distance or*

*open manholes are not scary anymore. You do not have to watch, decide, predict. There is light and there are they! They watch, lead, support when numbness comes with only sole flashes of consciences from time to time*<sup>28</sup>.

Ostrowska never tries to maintain the heroic ethos of the crossing. She is literary and even “civilian” in the way of telling her story, she is not afraid to show fear and weakness. And again corporeality plays a great role but it is not sexualised at all. We will not find here the emphasis on “femininity” – this category has vanished replaced by “a human being.” Going beyond the division of sexes and simultaneous keeping of a-heroic, honest and “civilian” tone constitutes the power of Ostrowska’s account. It also reflects the attitude of many other liaison officers. This way the ethos of liaison officers is created by itself, ethos closely related to the concreteness of reality not referring to the myth detached from it.

### Women “without uniform”

*There were mothers who fought. There were no husbands. In general there were no young men. A lot of women apart from children had also old mothers or grandmothers to take care of. But if they had somebody to leave the children with there were women who did so and fought. I think that they were fighting for these children*<sup>29</sup>. We can assume that if they had nobody to leave the children with, the children had to go through the hecatomb that the civilians in the capital were sentenced to.

Accounts of the civilians from Warsaw 1944 are usually on the margins of the insurrectionary stories<sup>30</sup>. Since they do not feed the heroic myth (especially that many of them show how the mood of the increasingly tormented residents of the city changed) and they do not document military actions. However they are not only an invaluable historical document but a unique testimony of the death of a city and the suffering of its inhabitants.

Against this background especially interesting seems the initiative of Edward Serwański to document crimes committed on the civilians from the capital – the accounts were recorded on the spot during the Uprising or directly after its suppression. These are memories but also testimonies dealing with very recent events and experiences. Persons telling the stories had no time to dress their experiences in a coherent narrative whole, to fit them in this or other discourse about the Uprising. In the publication *Życie w powstańczej Warszawie* which includes a selection of these testimonies we can find various accounts, often disturbing by their “inappropriateness.” The gathering of these materials was aimed at collecting evidence of crimes committed by the Germans on the residents of Warsaw so the testimonies usually refer to the most drastic experiences.

Many of these stories were told by women – young, old, mothers, wives, daughters, widows, housewives, students, clerks, teachers and nuns (as well as nurses and liaison officers). Their stories allow us to see the complete helplessness and defencelessness in the face of chaos of the fight. The civilians were not only left to the mercy of the enemy but to a great extent their fate depended also on the actions of the insurgents. The dilemma between the will to help the fighting and desperate attempts to save one’s own existence emerges from the majority of accounts. These testimonies also enable us to look at the Uprising from the perspective close to the one adopted by Białoszewski in his *Memoir*. Among testimonies published in *Życie*



*The Stone Sky*, dir. Ewa Petelska, Czesław Petelski (1959)

Photo courtesy of Filmoteka Narodowa

*w powstańczej Warszawie* we can find two especially emblematic: of Zofia Gosławska (other details unknown) who describes how together with other women she was driven as a live shield against the insurgents. The second is by Ms Tulewicz (first name unknown), a bank employee who on the day of the outbreak of the Uprising left a very sick daughter at home.

The first account recalls a critical and tragic situation: its author speaks about how she was led to death which according to the Germans' cruel plan was to be administered by "her" own insurgents. More or less a few hundred women were taken from their houses and gathered in front of the Gestapo's headquarters. In front of the tanks a group of women was placed and they were told to go towards the positions of the insurgents, they were driven towards Piusa Street, on the left occupied by the Germans on the right by the Poles. *Upon entering Piusa Street the German soldiers, before hiding in the tanks, told us to wave white handkerchiefs and call: "Don't shoot!" Women took advantage of this last recourse before inevitable death and towards the barricade on the crossing of Piusa, Mokotowska and Krucza went not so much a call but a scream intertwined with lament, cry and moan: "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" In our group there were only four women who did not scream. We were trying to control the situation by shouting:*

*“Don’t wave! Don’t cry! Don’t shout!” But our voice disappeared in the scream of women led to their death motivated by animal desire to save themselves no matter what – they did not scream but bawled as hell: “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” I felt then such a great contempt for my companions in misery that even the fear of death subsided. We approached the houses on the right side of Piusa Street occupied by our soldiers. I saw their faces with eyes wide open in dramatic tension looking at us; I read rage and despair in their eyes but at the same time I saw grenades and bottles with gas ready in their hands*<sup>31</sup>. It is hard to find a more disturbing description of a situation without exit, picture of the gap between an attempt to help the insurgents and desire to save life. This is a situation-lens in which focuses not only the specificity of the civilians’ position but of women themselves reduced to the role of a bargaining card in the conflict.

Another face of the fate of civilians is shown in the account of the clerk from Bank Emisyjny (The Issuing Bank). The Uprising started when she was at work from which she could not go back to her daughter left at home. For the first days of the Uprising the woman remained at the bank where *our Germans incessantly hanged on the telephones and sent various SOS messages in different directions. They were very afraid and wanted to be taken from there as fast as possible*<sup>32</sup>. After their evacuation the building was taken by the insurgents. During the wandering after the escape from the bank Tulewicz lost one eye and was severely injured. Until the end of August she stayed at a nursing point – *organised in a flat of a factory owner on his own initiative and at his own expense*<sup>33</sup>. But it was not the pain and loss of an eye that prevented her from sleeping, it was the fear for her abandoned daughter: *What happened to her, how worried about me must she be, was she evacuated? She cannot get up herself, she is so afraid of the bombing. And so on. I had to think about that. I thought I would go mad*<sup>34</sup>. Fear for their children, hunger and thirst, suffering, fever, continuous sense of danger were permanent elements of the insurrectionary existence of the civilians – both these in hospitals and these in shelters. But in the account of this simple bank clerk appears one more element which does not fit the canonical way of speaking about the Uprising and which undermines the heroic myth of its participants. Tulewicz says: *Floor after floor above us burnt – not completely but in parts – so we were moved to a shelter. But apart from that the situation in the apartments was rather gay. Various groups of the insurgents went through the house, followed by women. People said they were nurses but the sick complained about them a lot. I do not know what to think of it, but it made a strange impression on me: among the explosions of bombs, moaning of the sick, panting of the dying, these loud sounds of a piano coming from the upper floors, choir singing and maybe even dancing. I was not there, I do not know, I can say nothing more. I saw only that there was a lot of wine. The nurses drank it secretly by bottles*<sup>35</sup>. A moment later she adds: *These ladies [residents of the house that helped her] spent most of the time in our shelter because their flats were partially or completely destroyed and every time they went upstairs they returned quickly downstairs. Not due to the fire but for another reason. Soldiers broke into the wardrobes, plundered the flats, and in bedrooms the nurses were to be found in intimate situations ! What could these ladies say? This was the mood at the time!*<sup>36</sup> Even if this accusatory account is only a symptom (or a fruit) of the negative attitude towards the insurgents, it meaningfully reveals the distance between the part

of the civilians and the fighters. This isolation and strangeness is also a part, even though unwillingly accepted, of the history of the Warsaw Uprising. Their story suggests that the insurrectionary reality was not a heroic monolith, that it had different faces. It is also valuable as much as it touches the taboo of the morals of the young at the time. The taboo maintained – as it seems – precisely by women and then girls who tried to keep the impeccability of the image of the fighting in August and September 1944 in Warsaw.

The question of such concealments brings us closer to the present. Today more and more often we come back to the reality of the Uprising precisely in the context of what so far has not been said. It takes place on various planes. On the one hand the need to speak about what was a taboo until today is recalled. On the other hand the voice is given to those who until today were sentenced to silence. An example of such a need is for sure the success of *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet* by Sylwia Chutnik<sup>37</sup>, awarded in 2008 with “Paszport Polityki”<sup>38</sup>. In one of the four short stories in the book Chutnik tells the story of Ms Maria, a Jew, Kanalarka (woman who carried messages through the sewers) from the ghetto of 1943 and liaison officer of 1944. However, an equally important experience to the combat one is the specific female experience. The story about the fight is obscured by the story of a woman threatened by rape and humiliation. We find precisely this aspect of her fate to be powerful – because it was too shameful to talk about it, to not-heroic to recall it. Chutnik pays tribute to all women who had to go through such a hell. Using the figure of Ms Maria she builds a monument described in a strongly feminist discourse: *General, I report that as of today I adopt the pseudonym “Jewish Mother of God” matron of all female fighters of the ghetto and military uprisings; women shooters, bombers, murderers, rebels, sabotaging terrorist, madwomen with guns; women-revolutions who at night curl their hair to look well in the morning on the barricade; who tore their last tights so with a copying pencil they draw seams on their naked calves; girls in light summer, flowery blouses with huge bags over their shoulders. I spread protective wings over all the women who were caught by the enemy. I put my hands on their foreheads and whisper spells to their ears. I carefully wash off the semen from their tights, sew torn pants, and take care of scratches and scabs. I pray to myself that they may forget what happened to them. That they may wash off faces of their torturers, their words, shouts, panting and moaning. So they can become fighters for their existence again. I, the Jewish Mother of God, extend my hand to them and together we walk onto the very top of the barricade*<sup>39</sup>. The Jewishness is emphasised exactly in the gesture of restoring and naming what in the official, heroic discourse is concealed; the shameful status of the Jewishness to a certain extent equals the shameful status of femininity.

Until recently this way of looking at and talking about the fate of women in the Uprising was practically absent (maybe even impossible). After the book that caused such a strong resonance, the aforementioned project of *Feminoteka* took place. In interviews with female participants of the Uprising, both those fighting and civilians, they managed to extract very intimate confessions often regarding corporeality and fear of violence towards woman’s body. Kazimiera Jarmułowicz writes about the everyday life in a shelter: *hygiene was difficult. When you had to go to the toilet, you had to go out, find a moment they were not shooting and run to the shed which stood in the yard. Women tore some pieces of cloth and later*

*buried them*<sup>40</sup>. Barbara Tyc-Mazurkiewicz, alias Basia recalls: *but when the Uprising started I had no period. I do not know if this was due to stress but I had no problems on this account. It was a certain nervous shift, a kind of crisis. In any case, when I came back, my mother observed me and one day finally asked: "Basia, are you pregnant?" And I replied: "No, mum. Absolutely not"*<sup>41</sup>. None of the women who were interviewed mentions the fear of rape or sexual relations. Only Basia explains: *we slept together and were not aware of this sexuality, difference of sexes. We were colleagues, friends. I do not know how it was elsewhere*<sup>42</sup>. Maybe this aspect for girls of that time remains a taboo, maybe it destroys their own idealised view of the insurrectionary reality<sup>43</sup>. What is interesting in Wajda's *Canal* is that precisely the erotic tension constitutes an important aspect of relations between the characters.

It does not appear that Wajda was motivated solely by the will to sexualise female figures. We can notice here rather an attempt to bring the Uprising down to earth and physical love is an important element of it (this way it was also described by Białoszewski). And even today the female participants of the Uprising are silent about this matter; in none of the accounts – just as in the recalled memories of the scouts, nurses and liaison officers – will we find a mention of sexual relations. Maybe it can be explained by the young age of the girls who at the time were around 16-18 and the fact that today only the youngest remain. It seems however, that also the older women who are still among us carefully guard the image of purity.

### **I do not think there is a need to make such a film**

In 2006 in "Kino" an account of the discussion about the competition for a script of a film on the Warsaw Uprising was published. Participants of the discussion included: Andrzej Wajda, Norman Davies, Maciej Karpiński, Tadeusz Sobolewski and Dariusz Gawin<sup>44</sup>. Andrzej Wajda said at the time: *My impression is that the idea for this competition does not come deep from the heart but from some speculation, opportunism. But the answer as to the popularity of such a film I see here, in this room, where there are almost no young people. Spectators are not interested in this topic. I do not think there is a need for such a film. Also because the society is still divided in the assessment of this event: some say that it was a great event, the others – that it was a deep, unnecessary wound inflicted upon the society*<sup>45</sup>. Wajda's stance may seem surprising in the first place because in recent years we observe growing interest precisely among the young in the topic of the Uprising. It is confirmed not only by Chutnik's book but also by comic books published by the Warsaw Uprising Museum, numerous Internet forums whose users compete in their knowledge about the Uprising, publication by Foks and Libera as well as the most recent film project *Hardkor 44* by Tomasz Bagiński. Of course we can and have to discuss the way in which the topic of the Uprising is treated today, how it is inscribed in the area of pop culture and what the consequences are. However it is impossible not to notice that the young want to undertake such discussions and include their own thoughts in the Uprising-related discourse. And this proves the need to look at the Uprising from a new perspective, define one's own contact and relations with that reality and not necessarily with the myth that grew around it. Wajda's argument that the need to make new films

about the Uprising is made void by the fact that the society remains divided seems even more surprising – exactly this division in the assessments constitutes an important reason for making such films. I doubt whether the residents of Warsaw or Poles in general will manage to formulate a common stance towards this historical moment. It is impossible to create a film that would in an objective, comprehensive and satisfying to all way treat the topic of the Uprising. However the basic question is rather whether possible film projects should offer a clear, strong assessment or whether more important today are the attempts to describe and not historically summarise that reality. In the afore mentioned discussion Wajda also said: *There is so much talk about patriotism today... This film cannot answer the question about the sense of the Uprising. With Munk, we did films about the defeat in order to draw conclusions from it*<sup>46</sup>. This question of sense of the Uprising, however, is still within the area of myth-creation while opposite to it “concretum” remains neglected. Maybe the time is right to return to the accounts, events and evidence. The starting point doesn't have to be a thesis or an attempt to assess the Uprising, but the fragmentary, personal and always concrete “micro-stories” of those who spoke about their experiences. Voices of women are here especially valuable because they introduce us to the neglected area in the insurrectionary reality, so far concealed. They allow us to learn about the special type of relations that bonded women, this “sisterhood” which so clearly supplements the “brotherhood.” Entering this new area widens the perspective and in disturbs the monolithic discourse on the Uprising. The veil covering women's experience may finally be lifted and real nurses, liaison officers and civilians may find their place in the frame. The scenarios wait practically ready.

KAROLINA KOSIŃSKA

Translated by AMALIA WOŻNA

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<sup>1</sup> *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki (Uprising in a Floral Blouse)*, a film made by Feminoteka Foundation within the project *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki. Życie codzienne kobiet w czasie powstania warszawskiego* (coordination Olga Borkowska). Film and interviews with female participants of the Uprising had been placed on the website of the virtual Women's History Museum: <http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/> (accessed: 23.10.2009).

<sup>2</sup> The title refers to the “W-Hour” – the hour (17.00) set as the moment of the start of Uprising.

<sup>3</sup> M. Białoszewski, *A Memoir of the Warsaw Uprising*, trans. M. Levine, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Auto commentary to the book placed on the cover of the first edition of *Pamiętnik z powstania warszawskiego* by Miron Białoszewski. Quote after: M. Janion, *Wojna i forma*, in: idem, *Placz generala. Eseje o wojnie*, Sic!, Warszawa 2007, p. 82.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> M. Komar, *Opisanie i wyjaśnienie części powodów, dla których w literaturze polskiej – mam tu na myśli powieść, dramat i scenariusz filmowy – nie powstało do tej pory i pewnie w najbliższych latach nie powstanie wielkie dzieło o czasach wojny i okupacji*, “Dialog” 1973, no. 4, p. 150. Quote after: M. Janion, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> *Szacunek dla każdego drobiazgu*. Interview: Z Mironem Białoszewskim rozmawia Zbigniew Taranienko, “Argumenty” 1971, no. 36.

<sup>11</sup> M. Janion, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> K. Wyka, *Nikifor warszawskiego powstania*, “Życie Literackie” 1970, no. 22 (957).

<sup>13</sup> These memories, written down in the 80s were gathered in a form of a printed brochure by the former pupils of this school. However this was a print for “private” use, for the pupils them-

- selves, so I do not consider the brochure a publication. A copy of these memories was deposited at the Warsaw Uprising Museum.
- <sup>14</sup> *Pełnić służbę... Z pamiętników i wspomnień harcerek Warszawy 1939-1945*, ed. A. Zawadzka, Z. Zawadzka, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1983.
- <sup>15</sup> E. Ostrowska, *W Alejach spacerują "Tygrysy". Sierpień – wrzesień 1944*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1973. "Tigers" in the title refers to the German tanks and "Aleje" to the Aleje Jeruzolimskie, big avenue dividing Warsaw into north part and south part. This avenue was very important during the Uprising as it divided the city, but also Polish troops – the street itself was controlled by the Nazis and it was very difficult – for civilians as well as for liaison officers – to force one's way through it.
- <sup>16</sup> *Życie w powstańczej Warszawie. Sierpień – wrzesień 1944. Relacje – dokumenty*, introduction and editing E. Serwański, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa 1965.
- <sup>17</sup> The detailed description of organisation and the character of documenting actions can be found in the introduction to the book published by Serwański: See *Życie w powstańczej Warszawie...* op. cit., p. 7-49.
- <sup>18</sup> From the interview with Barbara Strynkiewicz-Zurowska, alias Romka, a liaison officer during the Uprising conducted by Sylwia Chutnik and Anna Grzelewska within the project *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki*. The text of the interview available at: [http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article\\_id=44](http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article_id=44) (Accessed on: 23.10.2009).
- <sup>19</sup> D. Foks, Z. Libera, *Co robi łączniczka*, Instytucja Kultury Ars Cameralis Silesiae Superioris, Katowice 2005.
- <sup>20</sup> J. Jarniewicz, text on the cover of the book by D. Foks, Z. Libera, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> E. Ostrowska, op. cit., p. 62.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 240.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 80.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 87.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 268-290.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 284.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 287.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 289.
- <sup>29</sup> From the interview with Kazimiera Jarmułowicz conducted by Grażyna Latos within the project *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki. Życie codzienne kobiet w czasie powstania warszawskiego*. The text of the interview available at: [http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article\\_id=46](http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article_id=46) (Accessed on: 23.10.2009).
- <sup>30</sup> It can also be clearly seen during the celebrations of subsequent anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising. While main celebrations sanctify the memory of soldiers and scouts fighting during the uprising and their graves are covered in candles and flowers, on the collective graves of civilians at the Powązki military cemetery there are only a few tokens of memory. Taking into account the fact that losses among the civilians were a few times higher than losses among the fighting, marginalisation of the question of the hecatomb of the Warsaw civil residents seems meaningful.
- <sup>31</sup> *Życie w powstańczej Warszawie*, op. cit., p. 174-175.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibidem, p. 134.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 135.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 136.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>37</sup> S. Chutnik, *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet*, korporacja Ha!art, Kraków 2008.
- <sup>38</sup> "Paszport Polityki" is an annual award presented by the Polish weekly "Polityka" in seven categories: literature, theatre, film, classical music, visual arts, scene and creator of culture.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibidem, p. 100-101.
- <sup>40</sup> From the interview with Kazimiera Jarmułowicz, op. cit.
- <sup>41</sup> From the interview with Barbara Tyc-Mazurkiewicz conducted by Sylwia Chutnik and Anna Grzelewska within the project *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki. Życie codzienne kobiet w czasie powstania warszawskiego*. Text of the interview available at: [http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article\\_id=40](http://www.feminoteka.pl/muzeum/readarticle.php?article_id=40) (accessed: 23.10.2009).
- <sup>42</sup> Ibidem.
- <sup>43</sup> It is significant that during presentation of *Powstanie w bluzce w kwiatki* in Warsaw Delikatesy of Teatr Rozmaitości Warszawa invited protagonists of the film, when asked about sensual love during the Uprising, all were indignant and said that these matters were for them completely insignificant at the time, that they had more important things on their minds.
- <sup>44</sup> M. Gil, *Warszawa, sierpień 1944. Temat na dziś: film o Powstaniu (dyskusja)*, "Kino" 1996, no. 9, p. 12-15.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 14.

# Three Voices on the *Ode to Joy*

*Ode to Joy* (2005) by three young directors – Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa and Maciej Migas – met with a particularly favourable reception from both Polish filmmakers and critics, as only few debut films ever do. At the 30<sup>th</sup> Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, the jury chaired by Andrzej Wajda awarded the film the Special Jury Prize, calling it one of the most interesting movies of the younger generation. Nevertheless, critics noted some weaknesses and described *Ode to Joy* as a *good Polish film made by young people*<sup>1</sup> and an important voice in the discussion about the generation born in the mid-1970s, and their chances in the modern world<sup>2</sup>. Does the film truly deserve attention as being exemplary of good Polish cinema, and talking about contemporary reality, and the problems of their peers, in an interesting and innovative way?

This piece is both an attempt to answer such questions, and a reflection of the conception adopted by Kazejak-Dawid, Komasa and Migas when they made the film consisting of three segments (novellas). *Silesia*, *Warsaw*, and *The Sea* – three short stories, three main characters and the same theme – an attempt to answer the question of why more and more young people choose to leave the country. Each of these artists tried to show the problem in their own way, at the same time adding his or her individual voice to the totality of *Ode to Joy*. The following short analyses of the stories in the triptych each focus on only one tale, and as such represent the critic's individual reflections focused on a segment of the work, although not devoid of references to the whole. When grouped together, they might be able to provide a sum of impressions and interpretations, which will create a more complete picture of the film *Ode to Joy*.

## *Silesia* or the sketch for a portrait of a generation

GRZEGORZ NADGRODKIEWICZ

I had the opportunity to see *Ode to Joy* in 2005 shortly after its first screening at the festival in Gdynia. It appeared to me as something fresh in the context of new Polish cinema, unpretentious, and above all touching on important issues – as I thought then – related to what is usually called “a generational experience”. I leaned towards comparing this first impression to the feeling when one is faced with an exceptional work, which breaks the rules, is formally compelling and ori-

ginal – in short, when in artistic terms “the new is coming”. Aware of the fact that we rarely have the opportunity to participate in such ground-breaking events, and that the reason for this exalted reception might be influenced by excellent post-festival reviews, I decided to verify my belief over half a year later, when the film was released in cinemas.

It is evident that when we watch the same film again we either discover more qualities, or find confirmation of weaknesses instead. And such was my second viewing of the *Ode*. Reluctantly, I had to admit to myself that I must retract – at least in part – my previous words. My excuse can be only that earlier I spoke of impressions, and these are often volatile.

I write this having seen the film many times. In particular, I repeatedly viewed the opening short story, *Silesia*. Again, I went through all the reviews and press polemics, hoping to lose an unpleasant feeling of distance, and rediscover the compelling impression from the time of my first viewing of the *Ode*. Following these attempts to re-assess the film, I must, however, admit that it does not stand the test of time. Today I consider this film to be indeed technically skilful, but rather shallow wherever the directors try to attribute to the experiences of their protagonists the status of “generational experience”. More importantly, this very obvious interpretative formula carries fewer interesting insights than, for example, an attempt to look at the fate of the characters through the lens of a universal theme such as the entry into adulthood. Although I ought really to focus only on the tale *Silesia*, I must at this point say that the inconsistency between the declarative statements of the directors, and what they have shown in their films, is characteristic of all three novellas. *As a whole, this is a film about a generation, or about one of its fragments*<sup>3</sup> – says Jan Komasa. Maciej Migas expresses a similar opinion about their joint project: *It was collective work, a film manifesto, the voice of a certain generation (...)*<sup>4</sup>. In a similar vein, Anna Kazejak-Dawid declares: *We decided to make a film, which would be a diagnosis of the situation of our generation*<sup>5</sup>. From the statements of the three young directors we gather that they treated making the *Ode to Joy* as a way of expressing their to some extent common experience<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, the words of Maciej Migas are puzzling, for he says: *We are a generation who has no common experiences*<sup>7</sup>.

Is *Ode to Joy* the voice of a generation?<sup>8</sup> Does it deal with experiences shared by a larger group of people, so intense that with time they could be considered as being common to the whole generation? Or does this film only address the problems of the few “elect”, who are strong, determined and brave enough to leave their old life behind, escaping stagnation and crossing the British border at Dover or in one of London’s airports? And finally, in view of all these questions, do the makers of the *Ode* speak on behalf of their peers, or simply “toy” with the subject, cleverly exploiting all its emotionality and the nostalgia of contemporary emigration – “for money”, “against stagnation”, “for love”, “against the daily grind” and “just for the sake of it”? In asking questions relating to the whole movie, not just to the story of *Silesia*, and in trying to provide answers, I probably work against the formula of this article, and devote too much space to the two remaining segments of the *Ode*. But I do so deliberately, believing that only through a wider reference to the other films by Komasa and Migas can we clearly show *Silesia*’s director’s views on the generational experience, in which she might have taken part.

*Silesia* by Anna Kazejak-Dawid is the only novella which implements the creative intentions of all three directors. We cannot conclude that rapper Michał from the *Warsaw* story is part of the wave of emigration for money (or for any other reason: a decent life; personal development; new prospects; or simply to enjoy equal opportunities in the social sense). He will no doubt work in London as a labourer on a construction site, or a washer up at the “kitchen sink” of a second-rate restaurant, but his motivations for leaving are of a very different nature – he leaves “for love”, in search of his girlfriend. Likewise Wiktor, from the last section of the film by Maciej Migas – although he announces to everyone that in London he has a job waiting for him, and a flat, his departure is simply the result of what happened to him after his return from college. He cannot cope with real life, and the only radical solution at that moment is to seize the opportunity to go to England – this is what he finally decides to do. Perhaps if somebody had just asked him to join a monastery, or if his girlfriend from Warsaw was still willing to tolerate him as a lodger and lover, he would not think of leaving Poland as the best and only solution in his tough life situation. Only Aga from the *Silesia* story fits the pattern of a young contemporary emigrant with all its consequences. This does not, however, mean that what she is experiencing is tantamount to a generational experience.

The beginning of the movie shows the moment of Aga’s return to Poland, where for a short period of time she will try to live her adult life. Together with her boyfriend, who awaits her return, she will rent a flat (even if only for a short while); with the money earned in London, she will buy, refurbish and re-start the hairdresser salon where until recently her mother worked; she will sometimes visit her father who is on strike in the mines – this can be interpreted as an attempt to restore the lost relationship with her parents’ generation<sup>9</sup>. But everything that happens to Aga upon her return to Poland will be only of a thoroughly temporary nature, the semblance of a new life in the home country. This is particularly well illustrated by the scene in which Aga, together with her mother and a friend Danka, renovate the hairdresser salon. A desperate effort to return to the “heyday”, accompanied by the half illustrative, half diegetic music “from the old days” (Krystyna Prońko’s song *You’re the cure for all evil*), seems to have no chance of success. Aga’s entry into adult life in her home country, at least this time, proves to be unsuccessful. On the one hand she has to sacrifice her own plans (giving up the rented flat with Waldek) to help her unemployed mother, on the other – she is helpless in the face of the fact that her father’s generation is trying to stay afloat at the expense of young people, who want to build their world free from the burden of their parents’ Solidarity past. Very meaningful in this context is the scene where Aga wants to sit on the flag which carries the Solidarity logo. Her father reacts strongly (*No, no, no – you will not sit on it. You will not sit on Solidarity!*), and the girl, surprised, replies: *Chill out, Dad* (this can be interpreted as an expression of young people’s attitude to the ideals of their parents’ generation). Another scene, which also takes place in the mine, develops this; Aga comes to her father shortly after her hair salon is ransacked during the riots that accompany the marching strikers, and states her position very bluntly by saying: *Dad, if you go to the bottom, it does not mean that you have to drag me there with you*. Trying to break free from the entanglements of – to put it diplomatically – this tough daily life, Aga decides to return to London. When her father, following the end of the miners’ strike and his return to work, asks her in

a sincere, albeit full of laconic answers, conversation about her reason for leaving again, she replies: *It's called survival instinct, Dad*. The novella's closing conversation with her father and above all the epilogue, integrating all three parts, in which the main characters of each story meet on a coach, emphasize Aga's situation as that of a typical emigrant – suspended between “here” and “there”, a stranger both abroad and in the home country. Her story comes full circle and returns to the starting point, thus confirming that her destiny is synonymous with living an emigrant's life; it is determined and conditioned by it.

The makers of the other short stories use the symbolic, to them, trip to London somewhat on the principle of *deus ex machina* – they make it into a solution, and even though it is previously mentioned in the plot, events do not necessary lead to it. In the case of Aga, however, London is both the beginning and the end, so essentially her life. She returns home disappointed and tired from her year in England, where – as she says – she was a “mop-pusher”, but goes back again, because in her home country she will not get anything better. Her fate, however, is not depicted in dark colours. Aga does not give up after her first failure, and takes on the challenge thrown up by life. Despite what she has experienced in her country, she is still able to fight for herself. What is more, she believes that this time things will be better – she reassures her worried father: *Don't worry, Dad!*

At this point, it is fitting to return to the question of whether *Ode to Joy* (or at least its first novella) really encapsulates the voice of the generation born in the late 1970s. Perhaps it is more appropriate to pose another question: whether the film by Kazejak-Dawid, Komasa and Migas can ever be more than just a well-realized trio of voices on the coming of age, in each case marked by a departure to London. I think that it is inappropriate for the filmmakers to refer to the *Ode* in such terms as a “film manifesto” or “voice of a generation”. After all, such descriptions are significant and should, at the very least, reflect what might be considered a generational experience. Meanwhile in *Ode to Joy*, the trip to London (whatever its cause) is the experience of just a few people. We know of course that the film's protagonists are seen as representatives of a certain group, but I think that the directors have not implied clearly enough that the journey to England is for Aga, Michał and Wiktor a generational necessity, and the common denominator for a larger group of people. I do not attempt to settle here the question of whether it is possible to talk of unity for the generation born in the late 1970s, especially as more and more terms are being coined and promoted in the media, such as the “JPII [John Paul II] generation” or the “generation of 1200 [PLN] gross”. And so, I am all the more inclined to recognize the *Ode* as a portrait in three scenes, of not so much a generation, rather simply of a group of the “elect”: strong and enterprising – as Aga; going into the unknown and not caring what they leave behind – like Michał; and those lacking determination, but wanting to enact change in their lives – so Wiktor in *The Sea*. In other words, *Ode to Joy* is not the portrait of a generation that mass-migrates to Britain, but a cross-sectional look at those who do come to England. Thanks to this changed perspective, we can see that emphasis is distributed differently. It is not a whole generation that escapes from a grey and depressing country, but one part of it that comes to London – for money, in search of adventure and a more interesting, worldly life, or simply because it constitutes their idea of being an adult.



*Ode to Joy*, dir. Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas (2005)

Photo: Gutek Film

I have the impression that the makers of *Ode to Joy*, in particular Anna Kazejak-Dawid, achieved something completely different to what they had planned. The declared portrait of a generation does not materialise here. On the other hand, what can be seen in the film is something which, because of its novella-type structure, I would call a mini study of the “coming of age”. Returning to her hometown, Aga is almost from day one forced to switch from the London way of life (where she was pinching a “quid” here and there from the tips jar at the bar to pay for hot water) to abide in the “here and now”. She sees her father on strike, her jobless mother close to a nervous breakdown, and finally her boyfriend, a former miner, who now earns peanuts as a security guard. This situation gives her an impulse to act – she decides to invest her hard earned cash in a hairdresser salon. This one move reveals how much she has changed in London. Not only has she altered physically (she is slimmer and has grown up – as noticed by an aunt visiting her mother), but also mentally (*I did not even notice when you grew up* – says her father in the ending conversation of the film). Her maturity is evident not only in the responsibility she bears for her family, but also in her ability to get up after a fall, and carry on despite setbacks. Even if in the other two stories this is much less evident, there too we can talk about a study of the coming of age. The rapper Michał forgets about his musical career when he has to look after his sick grandmother, and after her death he decides to fight for what is now most important to him – the love of his girlfriend, Marta. Wiktor also makes his first manly decision in life: for the first time, he reacts firmly when the manager of the fish-processing plant torments his friend Eryk; and he will also discard the indifference and withdrawal that has characterized him since his return from university by throwing the TV set, which provides his father with mind-numbing entertainment, out of the window.

Describing Kazejak-Dawid’s story, I do not repeat opinions on its dramaturgic effects and formal solutions which have recurred in reviews of *Ode to Joy* (among others, the inevitable simplification dictated by the brevity of the film’s form, or the far-reaching stereotyping of characters <sup>10</sup>) and which are not directly related to a possible reading of the generational problem in the film. However, I would once again like to raise the issue of the actuality of the *Ode*’s theme. Regardless of whether the trip to London is viewed as a generational experience, or simply as the dominant component of a generational experience, it is difficult to discern in Kazejak-Dawid’s film anything suggesting the director has captured an important issue that exists in the public consciousness. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the journalistic “immediacy” of cultural texts quite easily becomes obsolete. What is universal in this work will certainly survive. Seen from the perspective of several months or years, the younger generation’s desperate journeys to the UK do not seem quite so dramatic as the director suggests – some travel there for money, others to get an education (this is why Marta – Michał’s girlfriend from the story *Warsaw* – goes to London). If on the other hand we consider the film from the angle of a more or less painful coming of age, which evidently was not meant to be a dominant theme in *Ode to Joy*, we must admit that even two years after it was made, the film can still “defend itself” and is worthy of attention. But we are already talking about the universal aspect of the work, the layer which makes use of eternal themes, and if the creators are a keen observers of reality (and this can be confidently said of these three directors), they can certainly succeed in producing a re-

liable representation of the issue. More problematic, of course, is the repeatedly raised question of generational experience.

So is *Silesia* more than a story dealing with crossing the threshold into adulthood? If not a portrait of a generation (or one part of it, given that it is only one third of the *Ode*), might it contribute to it? It seems to me that it is more a sketch for a portrait, a trial drawing, in which different phases of activity or change are studied, to make them as close as possible to the original in the finished work; an artistic “dress rehearsal”, which shows a segment of reality, only fully realized in the final portrait. Such is the filmed novella by Anna Kazejak-Dawid. It shows the fate of a girl who could become an exponent of a generation. It is important here to emphasize the conditional tense. Aga could be part of a generation which is “going to London”, if we were confident that this mythical London is a generational determinant, that it is dominant among the generational experiences of people entering adulthood at a similar time to her. And of course, it is not right to interpret each of the segments of *Ode to Joy* as a sketch, which taken together make up a portrait. Rather, they are all at most a contribution to an overall portrayal of a generation, for they only deal with one segment of reality. Anna Kazejak-Dawid’s sketch for this portrait of a generation seems to be the most detailed; it is closest to conveying the meaning of this experience, which in Komasa’s work is only caused by a romantic impulse of the heart, and in Migas’ by a desperate attempt to overcome one’s own helplessness.

GRZEGORZ NADGRODKIEWICZ

## Warsaw or the choices of a rapper from the capital

EWA CISZEWSKA

The middle novella of *Ode to Joy* raised extreme reactions among viewers. According to a reviewer from “Gazeta Wyborcza”, the film by the young director appears schematic and banal, qualifying it as the weakest of the set <sup>11</sup>. In contrast, Bartosz Staszczyszyn considers Komasa’s novella as the best short story in the whole film: *Dramaturgically refined and well directed, it goes beyond the limitations of journalism. Apart from a few scenes (the vision of working in a large corporation), Komasa tries to avoid clichés and ready-made cultural situations. Thanks to this, the film is moving and memorable* <sup>12</sup>. It is easy to find the source of this controversy: some critics are irritated by the schematic plot; others delight in the authenticity of characters and emotions. But no one can disagree with the statement that out of the three stories it is *Warsaw*, in spite of its simplicity and predictability, which contains the largest dose of drama and tension. Undoubtedly its excellent acting is also to its advantage – the leading actor, Piotr Głowacki, in particular deserves praise and was nominated in 2006 for the Zbyszek Cybulski Prize.



*Ode to Joy*, dir. Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas (2005)

Photo: Gutek Film

The main character in the film is Michał Krzemiński, better known as DJ Peras in the hip-hop world he frequents. He and two friends are trying to break through into the music industry. The beginnings are not easy: he has to find equipment, hire a studio. But the biggest problem turns out to be the people, or rather the lack of them. His friends lose heart and energy, and have no time for rehearsals. Peras, whose parents are dead, only receives support from his grandmother (Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieślak). His girlfriend Marta (Roma Gąsiorowska), daughter of a wealthy businessman, also occupies an important place in the life of the hero. The girl's father, Piotr (Maciej Kozłowski), is not too favourable to the union of the young people. An up-and-coming rapper, who consistently refuses Piotr's offer of work in his company, is not in his eyes the perfect candidate for fiancé of an attractive, well-educated, and rich girl. Peras, wishing to live in harmony with himself and his professed values, comes face to face with a merciless world where all that matters is quick success and a job with social prestige.

In the novella *Warsaw*, we are very clearly shown the clash of the two worlds. On the one hand are those for whom capitalism has brought tangible benefits, in the form of a villa in the suburbs and a high-powered job in a glass tower in the centre of the capital. This is the world of those who – like Piotr – want to send their children to London, not to earn money, but to attend a prestigious university, to obtain, or rather “to consume”, an expensive education. At the other extreme are the people represented by Peras and his grandmother – with a flat in a communal block, no money to buy a mobile phone, who ride on the city's buses, and live from hand to mouth. People like Peras are always rejected at the “gates” of a trendy club. *Wrong face, wrong clothes, wrong night* – our hero is told by the bouncer in the club where Marta was having fun<sup>13</sup>. The very title – *Warsaw* – suggests a possible axis of conflict. The capital is the place of the fastest growth, the headquarters of companies and corporations – a space of social contrasts. It is to here that people from the provinces come (compare: *Warsaw* by Dariusz Gajewski, *My Place* by Leszek Dawid) in search of fortune and success. The choice of Warsaw as the place of action in Komasa's film is therefore entirely justified.

The clash of these two incompatible worlds is most painfully felt by the hero, when he finally agrees to work in Marta's father's company for a trial period. Peras was quickly made aware that working in a firm is a constant struggle for a better position and the favour of the boss. In this game anything goes: sucking up, denouncing, back stabbing. At all times one has to watch one's step and not reveal any weaknesses, as they will without fail be immediately used against one. Michał experiences humiliation at every step and is unable – in contrast to the hero of *Zawal (The Heap)* by Sławomir Shuty, also working in a corporation – to adapt and grit his teeth. For him, it is not enough to invent never expressed repartees, or to imagine one thousand variants of an explosion of the premises. Already on his first day he falls out with his superior and is called by Marta's father a fool and an imbecile. In effect, Piotr gives him a clear order: to stay away from his daughter. Peras' failure in a “real” job is the pebble which tips the scales and determines Piotr's aversion towards his daughter's boyfriend. The anger and bitterness of the hero, the shock suffered when hearing threats from the girl's father, but also the previously mentioned refusal of entry to the club, which results in a brawl with the security guards – all this leads to an impulsive break up with Marta. Peras rejects

the girl who belongs to the world which is the cause of his humiliation. The end of the relationship between this hip-hop Romeo and a nouveau-riche Juliet is not simply a consequence of the young couple's behaviour. It is the result of "force majeure"; the two worlds have proved incompatible. Łukasz Kłuskiewicz draws attention to a similar problem when discussing Komasa's novella: *Money barriers separating Marta and Michał prove to be too significant. They are children of the same culture, they understand each other very well, they share a mutual affection, but they belong to two worlds. (...) To be what one should not be, is enough to completely cease to exist. There is not one and the same world for everyone*<sup>14</sup>.

This hypothesis of hostile worlds that do not allow "racial mixing" gains additional support if we look at the families of Marta and Peras: Michał was brought up by his grandmother; only her father is present in the girl's life. Our attention is drawn to these strong emotional bonds. For Peras, his grandmother is undoubtedly the person closest to him; they support each other and are conversation partners. On the other side, Piotr is the loving father: he wants to provide the best education for Marta. Although he is not fond of Michał, for a while he tolerates him as his daughter's boyfriend. His feelings for Marta are most vividly depicted in the kidnapping scene, where Michał threatens his girlfriend with a knife. The agitated Piotr is capable of doing anything, as long as his daughter is not hurt. So it is not that the newly rich have no feelings while the less moneyed show greater empathy. Everyone is able to love in their own way. Only social barriers do not allow a happy ending for some relationships.

The engagement with social issues of Komasa's film manifests itself clearly in the rap sung by Peras' hip-hop band Tesla. The characteristic features of this music are, on the one hand, the language of the street, full of vulgarities and often modelled on prison slang, and on the other, an uncompromising criticism. *Rap, on social issues, wants to be the partisan of the poor, the exploited, the disadvantaged, the stultified – but this does not mean being on anyone's side. Rappers, just as fiercely as they do those at the summit of power, also attack all the others, young and old, for their conformism, lack of reflection, or greed*<sup>15</sup>. Rappers are on the side of those "at the bottom", at the same time being wary of any ideology. It is worth quoting here the lyrics of a song by Peras, recorded with Tesla for a radio contest: *I had no other chance, no other choice / In the city where money means status, beer is a delicacy / But not for everybody life is a race / You dream about status, wake up and you are a nobody / Cash was never my goal / I would lose if I thought with my wallet / Zero in the account, for some I am a zero / But I have pure emotion, pure intellect / All of you raise your hands up like me / Let's kill what the politicians say / They make shady fortunes, others lie at the bottom, sons of bitches / They did nothing for me or you / This makes me wander in the night / And only see happiness when I look in your eyes / Thanks. Strong beat, strong lyrics and sounds / Only you well know / Tesla band, man / Tesla band, man / It never misleads / Clean as a whistle – choose me for president.*

These words clearly reveal an involvement on behalf of the underdog – with whom the author of the above text identifies. It reveals the belief that getting money and social status are associated with selling oneself and giving up professed ideals. This correlation seems to be embodied in politicians. For the author, the only positive element in this so-perceived reality is his much-loved girlfriend. The final

words of the rap are not a ruthless call to the polls, but an indication as to the model of political life that would be most satisfactory for the subject. This is a defence of transparency and honesty, lacking in politicians. Peras' text is his *credo* – the way he perceives the world, the values he upholds. For him, rap is the bright side of life, an area where he can express his views. At the same time, he places feelings very high in his hierarchy of values – something which is confirmed in the final part of the film when Peras has a chance to record an album and start his rap career, yet decides to follow Marta to London instead.

The strength of Komasa's film is that it does not construct a simple opposition: honest rappers and hypocritical others. Michał's friends do not necessarily identify with the message of the song. For them, hip-hop is a way of passing time, and also a lure for girls. Some of them get discouraged when they have to demonstrate a minimum of consistency and commitment. Disgusted with his friends' attitude, Michał is thus bitterly disappointed by the hip-hop scene. What is more, the world of the media and alleged "fame" turn out to be flat and uninteresting.

The song by Peras features in all three novellas of *Ode to Joy*. It is worth emphasizing that we get to know its full version not in Komasa's piece, but in *Silesia*. The song accompanies a scene involving Aga and Danka having fun – the girls fool around, drink beer and dance. The director inserts the song into the film's text in a most interesting way: we hear the first tones at the end of the previous scene, which shows Aga and Waldek having a conversation at the mine. Then the music "moves" to a scene played out at the back of the gym. The initial suggestion that we are dealing with non-diegetic music turns out to be misleading<sup>16</sup>. Aga and Danka are dancing, singing, as if they can hear the music and the lyrics. The footage clearly indicates that Peras' song comes from the world shown. Through an open window, we see a young man lifting weights – it is very likely that he has turned on the radio, or a CD player. Thus the rapper's song also becomes part of the protagonist's world in the first short story. Aga and Danka willingly approve of Peras' music. Even if they are not carefully listening to the text, they accept it intuitively. It is significant that it is precisely in the opening novella of *Ode to Joy* that Peras' song appears in its entirety. Consequently, it becomes the motto of the whole movie, a refrain repeated in each story. Such an interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the song by Peras was selected as the sound track to the *Ode to Joy* trailer. Significantly, this song always resounds in moments when the mood – even if not strictly speaking optimistic – is certainly hopeful. Aga is just back in Silesia, talking to her father, meeting her boyfriend, and having fun with her girlfriend. For now, the world looks pretty good: chances are that everything will work out well. Peras' sound track appears in a similar moment in the novella *The Sea*. Wiktor is just back in his hometown when, on a fishing cutter swaying on the sea, the song by the rapper from Warsaw can be heard playing on the radio.

It would be too great a simplification to reduce the message of *Warsaw* to the level of a piece of propaganda, even though it certainly operates using clichés and set formulas. But it manages to avoid this unidimensionality; it does not divide the world into good and bad, sincere and hypocritical. Rather than depicted as decayed that part of society that did not benefit from the transformation of Polish existence, we see instead the workings of love in the family of the city rapper, who is taking responsibility for his actions. Nor does the director drop hints that would designate

the family belonging to the financial elite as dysfunctional – Piotr not only loves his daughter, but also reveals to her his feelings; he has a strong bond with her. In the film, there is also no apology for hip-hop culture – the musicians benefit from their popularity (they date girls coming to concerts) and objectify the music they have created. So we are not dealing here with a class struggle, but rather with an individual's choices and priorities in life. Michał finds his place in hip-hop – this subculture best reflects his values and way of life. But he might as well be a hippie, metal musician, hacker or someone who does not belong to any subculture. The choices he makes – an open rebellion at work, staking everything on one card in the name of love – place him amongst the uncompromising (although already life-experienced) idealists. *Warsaw* clearly promotes enterprise, courage and individualism, contrary to the escapist tendencies<sup>17</sup> prevalent in recent Polish cinema. And although these values do not provide for an easy life, they certainly determine its quality.

EWA CISZEWSKA

## The Sea or why Wiktor goes to London

JADWIGA MOSTOWSKA

The focal point of discussions about films such as *Ode to Joy* is usually the term “generation”<sup>18</sup>. Although I am aware that in describing the achievements of the youngest group of Polish directors, who in their films tell the story of their peers, one cannot completely give up considering them in a broader social context, whilst – according to the formula of this article – focusing on just one story of the triptych, I wish, at least partly, to get away from generalizations and generational tracks and focus on the personal story and finding an answer to the question: why does Wiktor find himself on the coach going to London.

The heroes of *Ode to Joy*, Aga, Michał and Wiktor, meet in the final part of the film, the epilogue connecting the three novellas, as passengers on a bus going to the British capital. Why are they there, why have they decided to leave the country? In the case of the protagonists of the first two novellas, Aga (*Silesia*) and Michał (*Warsaw*), the combination of events that lead to their decision to go away, and the internal motifs of the characters, seem rather obvious. Against this background, the reasons for which Wiktor decides to leave appear to be the least apparent.

After breaking up with his girlfriend, twenty-something Wiktor leaves Warsaw. He returns home, a small seaside town. But here, unlike in the case of Aga in *Silesia*, no one is waiting for him. The boy cannot count on support and understanding of the kind which the rapper Michał gets from his grandmother. His parents are not happy with his return. His father pays no attention to him, too busy watching a television game show in which he plans to take part, and his grumpy mother openly

shows her displeasure. She reproaches Wiktor for “living off” his parents again, and wonders aloud about the point of studying, which clearly was only a waste of time.

Wiktor lives in one of the caravans which his parents rent to holidaymakers in the summer season; it is for him a substitute for independent living. He finds work, but his studies in the capital are not really of much use – one does not need a degree in order to gut fish. Besides, the owner of the smokehouse who hires him treats all his employees contemptuously. He addresses Wiktor as “student”, but the condescending tone leaves no doubt that he considers him a spineless loser and a wimp, and higher education seems a mere whim to him. The boss also sees nothing wrong with delaying payment of his employees, whilst buying himself a new car. Wiktor does not feel comfortable in the knowledge that he has to do such a job. However, although he is able to accept for a while the lack of pay, like his other workmates in the smokehouse, Rysiek and Eryk, who for fear of losing their jobs do not rebel against the employer, he finds it hard to endure his boss’s sneering remarks. When it comes to an altercation between them, the hero prefers to resign rather than be dismissed. He does not want to go back to this job, even after some persuasion by his workmates, as it would entail apologizing to the owner. For now, his pride prevents Wiktor from taking this step. He prefers to regale his friends with a beautiful fantasy of how he will go to London, where a job and a flat will be waiting for him. But it is not Wiktor who is usually the boss’ victim. The “whipping boy” is Eryk, who endures in silence the pushing around and biting remarks, not really able to count on the support of his workmates (Rysiek does not want to put himself at risk, and Wiktor is too self-centred, busy with his own problems, and defending his dignity). Eryk also dislikes the manager because of the advances he makes to his mother. So when Wiktor mentions leaving the country, Eryk also sees his chance and proposes to finance their journey abroad.

Of course Wiktor is not satisfied with his present situation, but it seems that the only thing that really occupies his mind is not work, but trying to keep his relationship with his ex-girlfriend Kinga alive. The motives for his repeated telephone calls to his former partner are not, however, completely clear. Is it the strength of his love that makes Wiktor try to win back her favours, or the fear of losing his only constant point of reference so far, which gave him a sense of security? It is difficult to answer these questions, because little is known about the relationship between Kinga and Wiktor. It seems the break up occurred on the girl’s initiative and the hero has had to leave her apartment and return to his parents. The cause of the couple’s separation is not disclosed – the parting scene, which opens the novella, is devoid of dialogue and consists of a few shots only. That this relationship was quite important to Wiktor is demonstrated by later scenes. A few hours before his departure to London together with Eryk, he decides to visit his former girlfriend. It seems that Wiktor does not really want to leave, and if Kinga would have him back, he would willingly stay. Because they end up making love, Wiktor hopes that all is not lost. But the young girl’s cold refusal quickly deprives him of all illusions. Even worse, because of this visit our hero is late for the coach, and the departure does not take place. This lateness will have other consequences, which in the final part of the film will put Wiktor on the coach to London, together with other characters of *Ode to Joy*.



*Ode to Joy*, dir. Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas (2005)

Photo: Gutek Film



*Ode to Joy*, dir. Anna Kazejak-Dawid, Jan Komasa, Maciej Migas (2005)

Photo: Gutek Film

Preoccupied with attempts to win back Kinga's favour, Wiktor remains almost completely oblivious to what is happening around him. He cares little about the feelings of his old school friend, Basia. Yet she seems to be the only person who is truly happy when Wiktor returns home. It is she who first suggests the possibility of going abroad, depicting it as an opportunity to escape to a better world. Wiktor reacts to this idea with scepticism, probably in large part because he still hopes to get back with his former girlfriend. At the same time, however, he exploits in a fairly ruthless way the fact that Basia shows him more than just a friendly affection. He borrows her mobile phone to call Kinga. He does not care how much pain he causes when he calls his ex-girlfriend shortly after he makes love to Basia. Anyway, this act seems to be nothing more than a satisfaction of his physical needs, and Wiktor does not attach much importance to it. Moreover, the way it is shown in the film, when contrasted with the sensuality of the lovemaking between Wiktor and Kinga, seems to confirm his lack of emotional involvement in the relationship with Basia.

Wiktor also cares little about what happens at home. His father is preparing for the preliminaries in the game show. But in the end he lacks courage and at the last moment gives up what he had been preparing for such a long time. His son finds him on the seashore, resigned and jittery. His father is ashamed of his weakness, and at that one moment of honest conversation with Wiktor he admits that he has wasted his life. He asks his son not to repeat his mistake, and then returns home to sit back in his armchair, watching TV. For him it is too late to change. After this conversation, which seems to be one of the key moments in the film, Wiktor decides to accept Eryk's proposal and to go to London. Since the first trip has not taken place, our hero is back at the starting point. Head down, he goes back to the smokehouse to ask for his old job. With open satisfaction the boss reveals his contempt for him, but after the intercession of his workmates agrees to hire him again. Wiktor is aware that not only has he failed himself, but he has also failed Eryk, who did not have the courage to go on the coach alone. It is revealed that for his younger friend the whole situation has had far more serious consequences. To finance the trip, Eryk stole money from the owner of the smokehouse. The boss has already beaten up the boy, and continues to abuse him physically and mentally at every opportunity. It is such a situation that gives the main hero, who until now has been almost completely passive and has subjected his behaviour according to the decisions of others, the impetus to take firm action. Wiktor defends Eryk and raises a hand against his supervisor. There is no going back to the smokehouse now. His parents do not offer him any support and a visit to his former girlfriend in Warsaw deprives him of any illusions as to the possibility of rebuilding their old relationship. Wiktor decides to go to London. But before that, in a symbolic gesture of breaking with passivity, he throws away his family's TV set, which obscured the whole world to his father and made him prisoner of the four walls and the armchair. The hero does not want to waste his life like his father has done. For him, there is still time to change.

Why does Wiktor finally decide to leave? Without knowledge of the English language, any promise of a job or even some temporary accommodation, the finale of this escapade does not look too optimistic. It could only be undertaken by someone who either likes taking risks, or simply has nothing to lose. It is difficult to un-

earth anything in Wiktor's character that would enable us to describe him as brave and go-getting. In contrast to what Bartosz Staszczyszyn writes in his review of *Ode to Joy*, there is also nothing in the film which suggests that this journey is the young man's dream. *Disappointment in love and the lack of opportunities make Wiktor want to get away from the small coastal town. The trip he dreams about is at the same time the source of his anxiety* – says Staszczyszyn<sup>19</sup>. Whilst it is true that Wiktor is anxious about his journey, it is hard to accept that he really wants to leave; after all, both when talking to Basia, and when Eryk makes his proposal of leaving together, Wiktor does not seem enthusiastic about the idea at all. Even when, following his resignation from his job at the smokehouse, he tells his work-mates about his plans, it is safe to assume that his tale about London, where a job and a flat supposedly await him, is an attempt to save face in a situation where he has thrown away the only job he had.

It seems therefore that Wiktor decides to leave because he has “nothing to lose”. The absence of an interesting job, a relationship, and family ties means that nothing keeps our hero from leaving his home. *Loneliness is their natural environment* – writes Agnieszka Morstin-Popławska about the young protagonists, in a text devoted to youth as one of the great themes in cinema at the turn of the century<sup>20</sup>. Both Wiktor's character traits (passivity, introversion) and his life make him almost a model example of a person affected by loneliness, amidst people. Thus we can say that this young man leaves because he lacks strong bonds with his home country, his town, or the environment in which he grew up. Simply put, nothing holds him back. These reasons seem rather vague, but as it turns out, are sufficient. The hero wants to radically change his life. And what could be more radical than a journey into the unknown? That is why Wiktor does not even try to take other steps i.e. he does not look for a job in another town, nor does he think about a new relationship. He stakes everything on one card, although he is no gambler by nature. He will go alone on his journey to London. There will be no one there for him, no one about whom he cares. He can only count on himself.

The last short story of *Ode to Joy* seems to be the weakest of the three, not because *Silesia* and *Warsaw* are free of any weak points, but due to the fact that these two segments, filled with dramatic events, are more memorable. *The Sea* story, which is told slowly, with a rather expressionless protagonist, who perhaps arouses the least sympathy of the three, seems a little dull, compared with the other two. Wiktor's passivity, his focus on himself and his own problems, his hiding of his emotions under a mask of indifference – all this can cause the viewers to feel annoyance and impatience. *In the vast majority of cases, the hero's characteristics deviate from the norm, if the norm is a certain mediocrity* – writes Kazimierz Żygulski in his sociological study of the movie hero<sup>21</sup>. It seems that in this case the director has done everything to make his character embody precisely that norm perceived as mediocrity. The symbolic expression of Wiktor's attitude and life situation can be observed in the figure of a paraglider, noticed by him in one of the scenes. The man runs across the sandy beach, yet it seems that the glider does not lift him in the air but crushes him to the ground instead. It is difficult to believe that his efforts might be crowned with success. The ballast of the novella's hero is his character and approach to life. His attempts to change his situation are as pointless, desperate and hopeless, as the actions of the paraglider. Wiktor does not be-

lieve in his own success. He wishes that his life were different, but he lacks the strength to take control. He is struggling alone with the biggest obstacle on his road to change – himself. Wiktor is therefore an example of an anti-hero, lacking qualities which could win him the sympathy of an audience. We should appreciate the courage of Maciej Migas, writer and director of this part of the movie, all the more for deciding to tell the story of someone like him.

In addition to the previously mentioned paraglider, who can be regarded as emblematic of Wiktor's situation and attitude to life, there are other elements in the novella that – I think – we ought to interpret symbolically. The very title of the third part of *Ode to Joy* leads the viewer on this trail<sup>22</sup>. The sea as a symbol carries multiple, often contradictory meanings. *The Dictionary of Symbols* by Władysław Kopaliński gives a whole range of possible interpretations, but in relation to Migas' novella and its main character, the most relevant are those which treat the sea as a symbol of loneliness and immutability, but also variability, uncertainty, indecision, doubt on the one hand, and action, rebellion, adventure and discovery on the other<sup>23</sup>. It should be noted that this discovery of the unknown, or the “going out” into the world that the sea has symbolized up till now, is now represented in Migas' novella, and in the whole *Ode to Joy*, by a new, contemporary and very telling sign – the coach to London. We must also remember that the sea essentially consists of water, which can also be considered symbolic, in a complex and broad sense. Water is, among other things, emblematic of infinite possibilities, the revival of body and soul and cleansing. Moreover, Kopaliński mentions that water can be conceptualised as a mirror, in the sense of it being like a mirror of the soul<sup>24</sup>. Such a reading of the meaning of water seems particularly relevant in the context of *The Sea*, especially if we note how often the main character gazes at the sea, how often he walks alone on the shore, as if by looking at his reflection in the water, he might be searching both for the truth about himself, and for answers to the questions which plague him. Wiktor's father also goes to the beach to rethink his life, to look at himself, and to see in the water's mirror the face of a loser, who has wasted his best years. Water in the novella is omnipresent and is also found in the form of rain water, which symbolizes cleansing, blessing, truth, and ultimately sadness<sup>25</sup>. For Wiktor, all these meanings are present in his final parting with his girlfriend. Now truly nothing, and nobody, keeps him in the country. A chapter in his life is irrevocably closed. Returning to the train station after seeing Kinga, Wiktor is drenched by the pouring rain. He is depressed. Although late for the coach, he has finally, perhaps by ridding himself of his illusions, realized it is time to start living his own life, time to take some action and make a change. No matter how we understand or interpret this more or less obvious symbolism, we ought to appreciate it as an attempt to add depth to a contemporary story by referring to symbolic meanings preserved in cultural traditions, even if we feel that Migas does not offer in this regard anything particularly new or innovative.

When describing the third novella of the triptych *Ode to Joy*, it is appropriate to say a few words about the style of the film. Photographs by Radosław Ładczuk, made in cool tones of grey, blue and green, make even a clear day seem gloomy and suffused with melancholy. These colours naturally correspond with the generally pessimistic message of *The Sea*, stressing the emotional mood of the main protagonist. The same effect is caused by the sluggish narrative present throughout

the story and by scenes in which a small male figure is shown walking on an empty beach, seen from a distant, bird's eye perspective. Wide-frame shots showing Wiktor by the sea contrast with the various narrow shots and close plans which are used in much of the film. The camera films the characters in a seemingly careless way. This hand-held camera sometimes "slides" off the faces of talking characters, showing a few unimportant views and details. Often an obstacle crosses its path – bars in the window, a curtain made of beads, a wire fence. Parts of the frame tend to be obscured by various objects that happen to "stand in the way" of the camera. The function of these elements seems to be quite obvious and clear – the viewer has the impression that he is observing real life, viewing authentic situations. The style of the novella, and the formal solutions adopted, can thus be regarded as correct and appropriate, typical of contemporary cinema and consequently rather conventional.

Admittedly, the novella-type structure of *Ode to Joy* has imposed on the authors some far-reaching simplifications. In *The Sea*, as in other segments of the film, we have characters whose description does not venture beyond stereotype. Examples are Wiktor's grumpy mother, an archetypal domestic tyrant, or the owner of the smokehouse – a caricature of a contemporary Polish capitalist. Moreover, some narrative solutions proposed by Migas seem rather improbable; for example, the fact that Wiktor and Eryk go as far as Warsaw in order to travel to London. Obviously, this was necessary to resolve the Wiktor and Kinga plot but such a "round-about" way of travelling to Britain is somewhat improbable. Despite all the small slip-ups which might be pointed out to the maker of *The Sea*, it has to be said that *Ode to Joy* would not be a better movie without the third segment. On the contrary, it seems that the last part is a natural complement to the overall picture shown by the young Polish filmmakers.

JADWIGA MOSTOWSKA

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<sup>1</sup> M. Grochowska, *Oda do radości* (review), “Kino” 2006, no. 4, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. B. Staszczyszyn, *Złęknieni*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 2006, no. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Nie ma filmu bez ognia* (Jan Komasa in conversation with Maciej Dominiak), “Cinema” 2005, no. 9, pp. 20-21.

<sup>4</sup> *Nie dam się “sformatować”* (Maciej Migas in conversation with Maciej Dominiak), “Cinema” 2006, no. 3, pp. 18-19.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> In general, only Maciej Migas openly admitted that the topic of *Ode* is to a large extent close to his personal experience: *This film grew out of a generational experience. For my generation London has become a symbol. The thought of leaving was close to me. I was already on the verge of deciding to take a leave of absence in college and go on to London to find work. Fortunately, a few months before*

*the planned departure, it turned out that we won a scenario competition and there was a good chance of making a movie (Nie dam się “sformatować”, op. cit.).*

<sup>7</sup> D. Karski, *Oda do szarości*, “Film” 2006, no. 4, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> On various aspects of generational experience in the youngest Polish cinema, cf.: Ł. Kluskiewicz, *Generacja NICponi. Gdzie są buntownicy?*, “Kino” 2006, no. 4; M. Grochowska, *Pokolenie frustratów*, “Kino” 2006, no. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> During one of these visits, the father asks: *How did you get in here?*, and Aga replies: *How am I...? Fine. Thanks for asking* (this and subsequent quotations from the film's soundtrack).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. among others: M. Grochowska, *Oda do radości*, op. cit.; Ł. Maciejewski, *Oda do radości* (review), “Film” 2006, no. 4.

<sup>11</sup> P. Felis, *Oda do radości* (review), “Gazeta Wyborcza” on 14.04.2006 (quoted in: [301](http://ser-</a></p>
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- wisy.gazeta.pl/film/1,22535,3279137.html /accessed: 4.02.2007/).
- <sup>12</sup> B. Staszczyszyn, op. cit. (quoted in: <http://tygodnik.onet.pl/1548,1330295,dzial.html> /accessed: 4.02.2007/).
- <sup>13</sup> Andrzej Grella, a reviewer of the leftist "Nowy Robotnik" (New Worker), on the account of the social topic appearing in the work by Kazejak-Dawid, Migas and Komasa called *Ode to Joy* (and a film *The World is waiting for us* /2006/ by Robert Krzemppek) the hope of the Polish cinema. The author notes: *The in-human treatment of workers by employers occurs both in a small fish processing plant in Pomerania, as well as in a large corporation in the capital. Regardless of whether they smell of fish, or walk in suits – the workers are humiliated, robbed, even beaten...* A. Grella, *Czeka na nas dno*, "Nowy Robotnik" 2006, no. 27 (quoted in: <http://nr.freshsite.pl/?nr=31&id=618> /accessed: 4.02.2007/).
- <sup>14</sup> Ł. Kłuskiewicz, *Generacja (sprytnych) NICponi*, in: *Kino najnowsze. Dialog ze współczesnością*, ed. E. Ciszewska, M. Saryusz-Wolska, Kraków 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> M. Filipiak, *Od subkultury do kultury alternatywnej. Wprowadzenie do subkultur młodzieżowych*, Lublin 1999, p. 88.
- <sup>16</sup> This process – raising uncertainty about the ontic status of music – was applied by the director in the scene of the refurbishment of the hairdresser salon, where action is accompanied by Krystyna Prońko's song (see the text by Grzegorz Nadgrodkiewicz on *Silesia*).
- <sup>17</sup> I lean towards the theory put forward by Malwina Grochowska in her text written in response to an article by Łukasz Kłuskiewicz *Generacja NICponi (Generation of Rascals)*, op. cit. The author argues that hidden criticism and constant willingness to rebel characterize the heroes of Polish cinema. Grochowska writes in the text *Pokolenie frustratów (Frustrated Generation): Of course, if looked at a certain way, each character that sadly roams the screen can be accused of representing "disguised criticism" and "hidden discord". (...) I do not believe in their "introverted contestation". (...) Instead, I see lost and confused people on screen, surrendering to an inevitable course of events or even to stagnation.* The author refers to the character of Michał in Jan Komasa's *Warsaw* as the exception that proves the rule (M. Grochowska, *Pokolenie frustratów*, op. cit., pp. 22-24).
- <sup>18</sup> A term used both by those who consider it legitimate to use it for groups of people born since the mid-1970s, and by those who ultimately question its usefulness in the description of contemporary social phenomena. See L. Kłuskiewicz, *Generacja Nicponi*, op. cit.; M. Grochowska, *Pokolenie frustratów*, op. cit.
- <sup>19</sup> B. Staszczyszyn, op. cit.
- <sup>20</sup> A. Morstin-Popławska, *Młodość. Rzecz o duchowej bezdomności*, in: *Odwieczne od nowa. Wielkie tematy w kinie przelomu wieków*, ed. T. Lubelski, Kraków 2004, p. 53.
- <sup>21</sup> K. Żygulski, *Bohater filmowy. Studium socjologiczne*, Warszawa 1973, p. 40.
- <sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that, although the titles of the earlier novellas – *Silesia, Warsaw* – refer us to specific places and geographical areas, *The Sea*, to keep with the trend, should be called *Pomerania*. It remains, however, *The Sea*, as it refers not to a place, but rather to a state of mind and mood. To draw attention to this singular title of the Migas's novella, especially against the other two, seems all the more important that in some reviews as well as articles on the *Ode to Joy*, the third segment of the triptych was mistakenly called *Pomerania* (cf. M. Grochowska, *Oda do radości*, op. cit.).
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 230-233
- <sup>24</sup> Ibidem, pp. 480-484.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibidem, pp. 62-63.

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# ABSTRACTS

EDITORIAL.....4

## NEW INTERPRETATIONS

**Paulina Kwiatkowska** THE STRUCTURES OF MEMORY. THE IMAGES OF SPACE-TIME IN ANDRZEJ MUNK'S FILM *PASSENGER* .....6

*Passenger* was the last and uncompleted film by Andrzej Munk who died tragically in 1961. The film was finished by Munk's friends and collaborators on the basis of the footage left by the director. It is known that Munk was not fully satisfied with all the material and planned to introduce some changes. The film combines in an unusual way two forms of "records of memory" – photography and film. In a very interesting argument Kwiatkowska juxtaposes and interprets various spaces of remembrance that can be found in the movie.

**Rafał Marszałek** A BODILESS ENEMY .....31

The following is the text of Rafał Marszałek's address during the international conference on "The Warsaw Uprising in the Context of Polish-German Relations" (Warsaw, 30 March – 1 April, 2007). Marszałek argues that there is no room for an "absolute enemy" in the selected works by Andrzej Wajda, Kazimierz Kutz and Andrzej Munk of the so-called "Polish Film School" and that the films are free of the hatred to the Germans as invaders and occupiers. What emerge from the films are a toothless enemy and then a bodiless enemy. The thesis is exemplified in *Canal* – the death of the Warsaw insurgents is portrayed in a symbolic language; in *Ostinato lugubre*, the second part of *Eroica*, in which the Germans (as enemy) are not the demonic personification of oppression; in *The Dog* (part of *Cross of Valor*) – the hero saves the life of the dog guarding inmates at an Auschwitz death camp; in *Speed*, one of few war films in the history of cinema that does without the character of a (German) enemy. Marszałek points out that the "dematerialization" of the enemy flows from the special (both psychological and moral) instinct of self-preservation rather than forgiveness.

**Sebastian Jagielski** THE SPLENDOUR OF MALE RELATIONSHIP. ANDRZEJ WAJDA'S *THE PROMISED LAND* AS A BUDDY FILM.....37

One of the dominant themes in the work of Andrzej Wajda is the male homo-social desire. In *The Promised Land* it takes on a particularly dangerous form. Placing homosexuality (or more broadly – sexual minority) within a context of tolerant and accepting male community does not fit into accepted narrative of the nation, within which gays are always presented as enemies. Although in the film the ideal body of a Pole is contrasted with the anti-body of a homosexual Jew, the relations between them are not shaped according to the national, anti-gay script. Multicultural male homo-community is an alternative to family life and nation-state identity. In Wajda's film the weaning patriotic ethos clashes with the emerging, future oriented community. The analysis of the male homo-social community is preceded by a presentation and analysis of the American sub-genre of buddy films of the 1970s, to which Wajda directly refers.

**Tadeusz Lubelski** LITHUANIAN KIN. THE BIRTH OF ADAPTATION OUT OF THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY .....67

To Tadeusz Konwicki, the relationship between the author of a literary text and the author of a film based on the text consists in the "Platonic community of interests". *Here the adaptor uses a classic text not because he has to or has received a commission to adapt it but because it is the text he feels particularly attached to and because in it he finds the elements*

*of what he himself would like to put into the original.* Lubelski analyses Konwicki's creative activity from the point of view of the latter's love affair with adaptation, and focuses primarily on *The Issa Valley*, based on Czesław Miłosz's novel, and *Lava*, based on Adam Mickiewicz's *The Forefathers' Eve*. Spiritual affinity between Konwicki, Mickiewicz and Miłosz is the key to understanding of his adaptation strategy. The three had roots in the culture of eastern borderland while the Vilnius region was their point of reference. When translating the language of poets into a cinematic medium, Konwicki wanted to share his own "testimony of reading" which was very private, intimate and offered by the fellow artist. The "comradeship" appeared to derive from the metaphorical understanding of Lithuanian kinship that is becoming a state of mind, of memory and identity.

**Monika Maszewska-Lupiniak** *WAR BEADING UP INTO A RED DOT. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE IN ANDRZEJ ŻUŁAWSKI'S THE THIRD PART OF THE NIGHT* .....95

The author is mainly interested in the chosen aspect of autobiographic dispute, namely a film autobiographism understood as a defined communication attitude of the film author and the audience reaction generated by it. In this paper Maszewska-Lupiniak discusses autobiographism included in the fictional film narration of *The Third Part of the Night* by Andrzej Żuławski. His film, presenting a part of a family history, matches the autobiographic dispute. As a text about Holocaust it creates a universal message – the duality in the film structure makes us think about the relations between a creator and his work, between the ethical conditions of that relation. All that is reflected in the style and poetics of the film, which, in turn, makes the receiver of the story adopt a distant attitude.

**Agnieszka Morstin** *THE STORY OF A CERTAIN ILLUSION. THEORIES OF KITSCH AND THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE BY KRZYSZTOF KIEŚŁOWSKI* ...109

In the first part of the article the author presents three theories of kitsch: Hermann Broch's, Abraham Moles' and Milan Kundera's. These form the theoretical basis for the analysis of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*, which forms the body of the second part of the article. In the analysis Morstin focuses on exaltation, the primacy of the aesthetics, on the so called religion of beauty and aesthetical lie. In the conclusion the author argues that the analysis of the film allowed her to identify terms that belong to the dictionary of kitsch of the highest order. At the same time she maintains that the kitsch one is dealing with is not dangerous, as we are able to easily identify and formulate an insightful critique of the phenomenon. This means that our awareness of kitsch is higher than it was in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nowadays kitsch is no longer lived through. Rather it is used in different styles and art forms that offer both cheap thrills or exalted aesthetic experience such as in the case of Kieślowski's film.

#### TOWARDS THE DOCUMENTARY

**Tomasz Łysak** *ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF BELIEVING IN THE DOCUMENTARY. DARIUSZ JABŁOŃSKI'S PHOTOGRAPHER* .....128

Colour slides of the Łódź Ghetto were found in Vienna in 1987. They were taken by Walter Genewein, the Austrian chief accountant of the Ghetto. In 1998, Dariusz Jabłoński made use of the story of Genewein and his slides to shoot the documentary film *Photographer*. Jabłoński juxtaposed two realities: the world of a smoothly operating enterprise portrayed by the Austrian and the reality recalled by Arnold Mostowicz, the Jew and one of the few Ghetto survivors. As Genewein and Mostowicz tell two different stories their views have to differ as well. Hence, Mostowicz's disagreement with the reality documented by Genewein and the belief that it is a distorted picture which by no means corresponds with the remembrance of the place. Łysak tries to unravel the mystery of the points of view and understand the truth of the two sides. He also tries to take a closer look at the notion of a "documentary" and explore its possibilities as an objective record of reality. Łysak tries to analyse clichés of the pictures connected with the remembrance of the Holocaust (e.g. image of the gate of the Auschwitz camp with the inscription *Arbeit macht frei*) and the mechanisms governing a destruction of the clichés and habits (colour used in the portrayal of the Holocaust on the slides taken by Genewein).

**Mikołaj Jazdon** STARRING: PHOTOS. ON POLISH ICONOGRAPHIC FILMS MADE FROM PHOTOS ..... 140

Short iconographic films made from photos constitute a separate trend of the Polish school of documentary. It has been expanding with new titles over several dozen years. *Fleischer's Album* (1962) by Janusz Majewski and *A Working Day of Gestapo Man Schmidt* (1963) have taught Polish documentary filmmakers how to explore the possibilities of this form of film art. The two documentaries played a pivotal role in paving the way for a whole series of films based on pictures taken by the German troops and officials from World War 2, which presented the private look of the Nazis on the war and its victims. The subject matter of films made from pictures was gradually broadening. These films told the story of the Holocaust and of lack of the victims' look on the Holocaust, embalmed in photography. Films on the Polish resistance movement were also made, with particular emphasis on the Warsaw Uprising. The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century became the subject of documentaries at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s. Pictures used in almost all of Kazimierz Karabasz's films are regarded as a medium enriching the documentary with a new reality dimension that cannot be captured by the camera. His films, *Summer in Żabno* (1977) and *Portrait in a Drop of Water* (1997), show that films made from photos are perfectly suitable for depicting the present day.

**Sebastian Liszka** I'LL GET RID OF MY BODY. ON MARCIN KOSZAŁKA'S AND JERZY NOWAK'S *BEING* ..... 159

In the article about *Being* (*Istnienie*, 2007), a documentary by Marcin Koszałka, the author tries to reconstruct the cultural tropes present in the film. In his analysis he considers the overlapping points of reference present in the film and film viewing experience, namely that of the director-camera operator, actor-hero and viewer-interpreter. Using the ideas of ethics in legal and medical discourse, memory, film aesthetics, references to baroque dance macabre and a postmodern ambience the author creates an image of a decline of a particular form of artistic representation of world and people.

**Beata Kosińska-Krippner** BETWEEN FACT AND FICTION. DOCUMENTARY TELENOWELA, OR DOCUSOAP POLISH STYLE ..... 169

The article deals with documentary soap operas, or the Polish version of docusoaps. This is a television genre that is a hybrid of observational documentary and elements typical of soap operas. In the introduction the author presents up to date research on docusoaps: she defines, following Margaret Lünenborg, the conditions that had to be met, in order for the genre to come into the existence, and she shows the circumstances in which it first appeared. She refers to the work of Richard Kilborn in order to present characteristic features of docusoap, and she uses the staging strategies for reality TV described by Elisabeth Klaus and Stephanie Lücke, in order to show staging strategies in docusoaps. In the main part of the article Kosińska-Krippner presents a short history of documentary soap operas, classification of its various types and the analysis of its components. She then defines this genre and describes its features. In the conclusion the author compares docusoaps and documentary soap operas, and shows the similarities and differences between the two genres, she also comments upon the value and usefulness of this genre.

**SIGNS OF TIME – IN SEARCH OF FORM**

**Anna Taszycka** AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD.

*THE ADVENTURE OF A GOOD CITIZEN* BY FRANCISZKA AND STEFAN THEMERSON AS A PORTMANTEAU FILM ..... 190

Taszycka presents an analysis of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* (1937) based on a back-to-front showing of the film. Themerson himself, in a letter to Clyde Jeavons, suggested that showing the film backwards might be an interesting idea. Taszycka argues that not only is the backwards projection of the film possible, but it opens up the film to new interpretations. The author points to the well thought and coherent concept of the film as a whole (understood as a combination of showing the film in the conventional way and backwards) and the auto-thematic character of the film, showing its surfictional nature. *The Adventure...* can also be placed in a wider context thanks to its circular structure, where the beginning can

also be the end of the film (and *vice versa*). This shows that Themersons were ahead of their time, as their film is a precursor of structural films and expanded cinema made decades later. Additionally, Taszycka shows that *The Adventure...* is a sort of a film palindrome that reveals its meaning both in the conventional and backwards projection. In order to describe the film – according to its structure – Taszycka also uses the metaphor of a portmanteau. Two identically symmetrical parts (the same ones, but not identical) of the portmanteau film create a new being, that has an autonomous existence.

**Marcin Giżycki** CONSTRUCTION – REPRODUCTION. GRAPHICS, PHOTOGRAPHY AND FILM IN POLISH CONSTRUCTIVISM .....203

Giżycki deals with the problem of an interest in photography and film, shown by Polish avant-garde artists from its beginnings. According to Giżycki, photomontage, film, prints made of typographic elements, and first of all film collage were the means that were perfectly suitable for the realisation of Constructivist ideas. One of the basic aims of Constructivism – to turn towards new materials – could be put in practice through the use of finished and prefabricated elements. Giżycki traces the way in which the artworks were evolving from the “literary quality” of the early photomontages of Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Żarnower’s abstract and geometric compositions, Stefan and Franciszka Themerson’s films, inspired by Constructivism *Pharmacy* (1930) and *Europa* (1932) and Jalu Kurek’s (*Rhythmic Calculations*, 1932) into typically collage-montage films of Janusz Maria Brzeski (*Sections*, 1931; *Concrete*, 1933) or his anti-Utopian and anti-industrial series of photomontages *Birth of a Robot* (1934). Giżycki also points out that after a period of Utopian projects by artists relishing a regained freedom, the Constructivists expressed through art their, mostly left-wing, political beliefs.

**Jacek Świdziński** BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND MELANCHOLY. VIDEO PERFORMANCE *FROM MY WINDOW* BY JÓZEF ROBAKOWSKI – AN ATTEMPT AT RECONSTRUCTION AND ANALYSIS .....217

The author reconstructs the conceptual aspect of Józef Robakowski’s performance, which is the genesis of the film *From My Window*. Through treating a film camera set against a window as a prop in the performance, Robakowski analyzed the relationship between individual subject and the external world. In the movie made in 1999, material filmed over 21 years was used by Robakowski in order to illustrate a fictional, nostalgic account full of persons and events from the socialist period of Poland and the early Third Polish Republic. At the same time, by hinting at the manipulation, Robakowski forces the viewer to be critical towards the proposed versions of history. According to Świdziński, the video performance dealing with the relations of the subject with the outside world is marked by the division between nostalgia and melancholy. This reflects the condition of the human subject as a being always situated “in between”.

**Marcin Maron** HEAD OF MEDUSA, OR REALISM IN FILMS OF THE CINEMA OF MORAL ANXIETY .....231

The article discusses the films belonging to the Cinema of Moral Anxiety (1976-1981) as the most characteristic examples of realism in film in Polish cinematography between 1945 and 1989. The main aim of the early feature films of Krzysztof Kieślowski, Agnieszka Holland, Feliks Falk, Janusz Kijowski, and the work by Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Zanussi and Janusz Zaorski that can be classified as Cinema of Moral Anxiety, was a critical description of reality. This description was possible, thanks to skillful handling of the medium of photographic realism and realism in staging. The first part of the article presents in brief the historical and cinematographic context of the origins of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety. The second part discusses the major films of the movement in terms of the relationship between the strategies used in them and the process of creation of their critical and descriptive character. The order of the argument is set out by the achievements of four film cinematographers: Sławomir Idziak, Edward Kłosiński, Jacek Petrycki and Krzysztof Wyszyński. The following are the key issues: how does photographic realism manifests itself in film? How does it define their aesthetics and what is its impact on the creation of the director’s reflection upon socio-political context of the time? What are the limitations and difficulties associated

## ABSTRACTS

with the aesthetics of realism? The third part of the article deals with the relationship of the realist aesthetics of the films belonging to the Cinema of Moral Anxiety movement with the moral reflection contained within them. The article concludes with some reflection upon typical protagonists of the films of the Cinema of Moral Anxiety.

**Karolina Kosińska** THAT WHICH IS ABSENT. ACCOUNTS AND MEMORIES OF WOMEN FROM THE WARSAW UPRISING AS READY-MADE BUT NOT USED FILM SCENARIOS .....257

In Polish feature films about the Warsaw Uprising there are no women. They of course appear as nurses, civilians or liaison officers. But they are always part of the background, seen, but not looking, symbolic in their presence, and never the active heroines; always serving, and never independent or autonomous. If they are the heroines of the drama, then they are part of someone else's drama, and are not given a voice of their own. Their narratives and accounts of life, even everyday life, are left unsaid, hidden behind grand and epic narratives of the heroes. The article is about women's "micro-narratives", the memories of women who lived in Warsaw and participated in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. The memories give us a chance to see the Uprising in a different light, one that includes the women's perspective and experience of the Uprising. Women's accounts, due to their graphic nature and their uniqueness appear to be ready-made but not used film scenarios.

**Grzegorz Nadgrodkiewicz, Ewa Ciszewska, Jadwiga Mostowska** THREE VOICES ON THE *ODE TO JOY* .....283

In this three-part article its authors attempt to discuss one of the most exciting debuts in the Polish cinema of the recent years – *Ode to Joy* (2005). The first text, corresponding with the first part of the feature, examines the content of Anna Kazejak-Dawid's etude entitled *Silesia (Śląsk)*. Grzegorz Nadgrodkiewicz makes a subjective evaluation of the degree to which the etude withstood the test of time and tries to decide to what extent the generational criterion may be useful in interpreting the etude. Commenting on Jan Komasa's episode, entitled *Warsaw (Warszawa)*, Ewa Ciszewska focuses on Poland's social stratification during transformation and on its consequences for the young. Also analysed is the manner in which hip-hop culture is represented here. The third text discusses Maciej Migas's episode *The Sea (Morze)*. Jadwiga Mostowska focuses on the key plots, motifs and, first of all, on the central character to depart from generational tropes in favour of a reflection on the film itself – a work of art of the young director who wants to tell a story.

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