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# THE CINEMATIC MATERIALITY OF LITERATURE

The interactions between literature and film allow literature to reflect on its complex ontology defined by the alternating materialization and dematerialization of the literary. Cinematic techniques, cinematic shots and compositional experiments point to the, sometimes elusive, materiality of literature.

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# The Cinematic Materiality of Literature

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz

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*Almost a hundred years ago, Karol Irzykowski, a literary critic and writer, published a pioneering book on the aesthetics of film entitled *Dziesiąta Muza* [The Tenth Muse]. Irzykowski argued that “cinema makes the interaction between man and matter visible.” It may be an interesting topic for contemporary literary studies, where the materiality of text, the materiality of poetics and/or certain poetical concepts, and the situation in which text points to materiality is currently under discussion. The interactions between literature and film allow literature to reflect on its complex ontology defined by the alternating materialization and dematerialization of the literary. Cinematic techniques, cinematic shots and compositional experiments point to the, sometimes elusive, materiality of literature. It is thanks to film that materiality becomes, as Irzykowski would say, visible and, at times, finds itself at the heart of literature.*

*The contributors to this issue of Forum of Poetics prove that Irzykowski’s observations could not be more apt. For from the very beginning of film, that is already in the era of silent films, literature captured its materiality and the human-material existential parameters of the modern subject thanks to its close relations to film. That is why we should carefully consider the moment of this first contact between literature and film, which later, it seems, could have been naturalized and ceased to be perceived as dependent on cinema. Indeed, it permanently and strongly defined the ontology of the modern literary work. In the case of poetry, the relations between both were, as the contributors to this issue of Forum of Poetics emphasize, mutual. Wojciech Otto prepared a systematic overview of these relations, identifying the places for possible mechanisms of materialization and dematerialization of the literary as influenced by film. Joanna Orska, in turn, demonstrates that a similar process took place in the early theoretical texts and manifestos of Polish avant-garde constructivist*

poets (*Awangarda Krakowska* [*Krakow Avant-Garde*]). An important context for her remarks is provided by Pavle Levi, who analyzed the poetics of the “written film” of the Serbian artistic avant-garde in the interwar period (a translation of an excerpt from his book is included in this issue of *Forum of Poetics*). The same applies to prose. Aleksander Wójtowicz analyzes a pre-war cinematic novel by Jan Brzękowski which imitates the script of a silent film and thus engages in an innovative play with the materiality of text. Małgorzata Hendrykowska examines a forgotten article by Stefania Zahorska from the 1930s in which Zahorska comments on how film may enrich literary means of expression, making literature “analytical and sensual.”

The consequences of making the materiality of literature visible through film may be traced further. Polish poets of the New Wave (i.e., the generation of 1968), as Kamila Czaja writes, consciously refer to cinema, discovering the cinematic aspects of poetry. The most modern manifestations of these complex relationships are analyzed by Rafał Koschany, for whom the constant presence of film in contemporary poetry has nothing to do with ekphrasis. Koschany argues that it points to everyday life, to the practice of “talking about movies,” where the filmic, the literary and the material constantly intertwine in new and innovative ways. When it comes to prose, Andrzej Kuśniewicz in his novel *Lekcja martwego języka* [*Lesson of a Dead Language*] (1977), analyzed by Antoni Zajac, constructs the ontology of the sign-cipher-hologram. Kuśniewicz employed cinematic means of expression to process the subtle presence of the past. In turn, William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), a cyberpunk futurological vision strongly inspired by film analyzed by Piotr Prusinowski, may be a manifestation of fear of the progressive dematerialization of life. For Marcin Jauksz, *The Piano* (1993), based on the clichés found in a Victorian novel, is an auratic adaptation, insofar as film and literature recreate the aura of the 19th century, i.e., the fleeting material aspect of the past, since the film evokes the flickering materiality of literature and film. Respectively, Dorota Kulczycka analyzes the adaptation of the bestselling crime novel by Marco Vichi, demonstrating how cinematic means of expression have become part and parcel of the poetics of the contemporary detective novel and how carefully one must read such a novel in order to capture its cinematic and material aspects.

In addition, we also publish two authorial essays. Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki explains how he “creatively adapted” his short story into a movie, developing an important autobiographical trope for the second time and experiencing the materiality of his own prose differently through film. Marek Hendrykowski, who is to publish a historical novel devoted to the history of Poznań and Wielkopolska, re-arranges the relationship between history and the novel in order to access the materiality of the past anew.

Agnieszka Waligóra’s article as if provides a conclusion for this issue of *Forum of Poetics*. Waligóra analyzes Jacques Rivette’s experimental film with the help of Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy, demonstrating how the kinetic nature of film can influence every intellectual work in the field of poetics, theory and methodology, insofar as concepts, including poetical concepts, have the dynamics of substances and matter set in motion. The characters of the ancient drama, whom Rivette materializes on screen, aim to accomplish or discover something and thus determine the trajectory of analysis, or as Deleuze puts it, the “logic of meaning,” which will follow the energies and materialities of the concepts acting in the film and literary text.

# On the Cinematicity of Literature:

## Correspondences, Relationships, Parallels (On the Example of the Polish Interwar Period)

Wojciech Otto

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In 2019 the publishing house *Wydawnictwo Ec1 Łódź* released *Zawrót głowy. Antologia polskich wierszy filmowych* [Vertigo. Anthology of Polish Film Poetry] edited by author, filmmaker and visual artist Darek Foks. The 400-page volume contains several hundred poems by Polish poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, in whom the editor identified manifestations of some inclination towards the cinema. Foks's selection was dictated by several factors. First and foremost was the editor's conviction of the cinematic character of those poems, expressed through cinema-related motifs, or plot and narrative structures related to the cinema. This (somewhat intuitive) approach by the editor, who selected and classified individual poems, testifies to a rather loose and relative attitude towards the relationship between literature and film in contemporary culture, and also clearly reflects a popular conviction that the relationship between literature and visual arts is rich and deep.

The vectors of these influences are directed in both directions and take various forms. In literature, they are referred to as borderlands, affinities, relationships, affiliations, and corre-



spondences, as well as: a “community” or “mutual illumination” of the arts<sup>1</sup>. Anita Has-Tokarz writes about several comparative perspectives:

- the mutual translatability of works representing different communication systems (film adaptations of narrative literary works);
- mutual structural-formal and linguistic relations, attempts at borrowing and adapting themes, narrative techniques, means of expression used by one medium in another (i.e. the literary character of a film or the cinematic character of literature);
- compositional analogies between texts belonging to different material orders (ways of constructing the represented world in feature arts);
- the status of literature and film as media which occupy a specific place and have specific functions in social communication (specification of literature and film communication);
- the participation of literature and film in culture, and their abilities to influence social awareness (literature and cinema culture)

She also observes that for decades they have been subject to various metamorphoses resulting from the emancipation of film, as well as the stormy and dynamic transformation within literature itself<sup>2</sup>.

Depending on the methodology, the question of the so-called cinematicity of literature can be approached in various aesthetic, cultural and sociological contexts. Apart from the semiological tradition, which has enjoyed a stable position in literature, film and media studies, new, sometimes unobvious approaches are also becoming increasingly popular. They acknowledge transformations literature has undergone due to the development of modern technologies, as well as forms and channels of cultural communication. Not just the internal structures of individual works of literature or film are analyzed, but also their media transpositions, which accords with historical remediation processes<sup>3</sup>. “Film affordances in literature”<sup>4</sup>, intertextual references, or intermedia translations<sup>5</sup> are just some examples of this cultural convergence. Various typologies, typically incomplete ones, are created for the purpose of the above-mentioned theories. However, they omit important social and cultural determinants, and hence increase their cliquish and fragmentary character.

<sup>1</sup> See René Wellek, *Literatura wobec innych sztuk* [Literature and other arts], In: R. Wellek, A. Warren, *Teoria literatury* [Theory of literature], translated by M. Żurowski, Warszawa 1970; *Pogranicza i korespondencje sztuk* [Borderlands and correspondences of arts], edited by T. Cieślakowska and J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1980; *Intersemiotyczność. Literatura wobec innych sztuk (i odwrotnie)* [Intersemiotics: Literature and other arts], edited by S. Balbus, A. Hejmej, J. Niedźwiedz, Kraków 2004; Oskar Walzel, *O wzajemnym oświeclaniu się sztuk* [On the mutual enlightening of arts], translated by E. Feliksiak, “Przegląd Humanistyczny” 1966, No 4; Henryk Kurczab, *Pogranicza sztuk i konteksty literatury pięknej* [Borderlands of arts and contexts for literature], Rzeszów 2001; Janusz Pelc, *Słowo i obraz: na pograniczu literatury i sztuk plastycznych* [Word and picture: on the borderland of literature and visual arts], Kraków 2002; Maryla Hopfinger, *Literatura w kulturze audiowizualnej* [Literature in the audio-visual culture], “Pamiętnik Literacki” 1992, z. 1; Jerzy Ziomek, *Powinowactwa literatury* [Associations of literature], Warszawa 1980; Seweryna Wyśłouch, *O “wzajemnym oświeclaniu się sztuk” – raz jeszcze* [On the mutual enlightening of arts – again], “Polonistyka” 2002, No 8 and *Literatura a sztuki wizualne* [Literature and visual arts], Warszawa 1991.

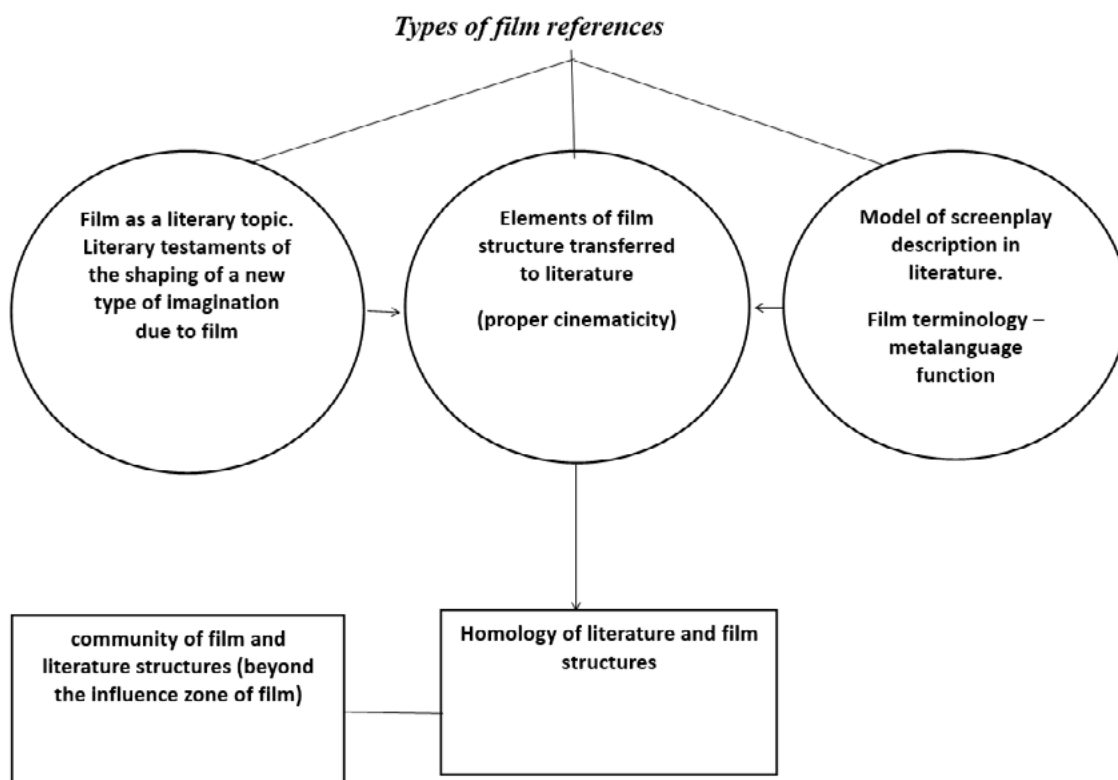
<sup>2</sup> Anita Has-Tokarz, *Między słowem a obrazem: afiliacje literatury i filmu (perspektywa komparatystyczna)* [Between word and picture: affiliations of literature and film (comparative perspective)], “Folia Bibliologica” 2006/2007, No XLVIII/XLIX, 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> See Jerzy Stachowicz, *Komputery, powieści i kino nieme. Procesy remediacji w perspektywie historycznej* [Computers, novels and silent film. Remediation processes from a historical perspective], Warszawa 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Ślósarz, *Dwa bieguny filmowych afordancji w literaturze XXI wieku* [The two poles of film affordances in 21st century literature], In: *Ze srebrnego ekranu na papier... Ślady sztuki filmowej w literaturze* [From screen to paper... Traces of film art in literature], edited by D. Kulczycka, Zielona Góra 2019, 21-38.

<sup>5</sup> Maria Jazownik, Leszek Jazownik, *Formy obecności filmu w literaturze fikcjonalnej* [Forms of film's presence in fiction], In: *Ze srebrnego ekranu...*, 39-68.

In this context, Maria Zeic-Piskorska's proposal looks convincing. Despite some irrelevant anachronisms, resulting from the fact that the book was published some time ago, the idea remains valid, for it acknowledges both the external (shaping a new type of recipients and the socio-cultural situation), and internal organization of a work of art, by introducing such notions as "proper cinematicity", "community and homology of structures"<sup>6</sup>.



Zeic-Piskorska assumes the existence of points of contact whose essence reveals itself mostly in the convergence of some initial models concerning the composition, narration and character surfaces. One consequence of such references is the modeling of literary structures on film, also known as "proper cinematicity", i.e. copying one or more elements of a film's structure, which becomes a compositional dominant in a given work of literature. The parallelism of certain literary particles in reference to certain ontological or compositional characteristics of film can appear independently, as a result of transformations taking place exclusively within the intra-literary process. Such an assumption allows for the introduction of parallels between the community of arts and a special type of homology resulting from the convergence of the model of literary description with the ontological character of film description<sup>7</sup>.

Such a proposal offers broad opportunities for the description and interpretation of individual works of both literature and film, as well as socio-cultural phenomena surrounding their production, distri-

<sup>6</sup> Maria Zeic-Piskorska, *Próba typologii przejawów tzw. filmowości w utworach literackich* [A typology of manifestations of so-called cinematicity in literature], "Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici", Filologia Polska XIX, z. 119, Toruń 1981, 169-188.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 174, 181 i 186.



bution, and reception. The relationships between the two arts, here with a focus on the transformation of literature under the influence of film, considered from a perspective limited to a given time and place, are now becoming a phenomenon with significant aesthetic and culture-forming value.

## Vectors of influence

From a diachronic perspective, the *in statu nascendi* of the direct relations between the two arts in question, phenomena related to the transformation of film under the influence of literature, have been more dominant and widely recognized by contemporary intellectual and artistic elites. At the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the cinema – as a medium boldly striving towards Parnas – was forming its own language of artistic expression and looking for a suitable place within various cultural registers. Due to obvious similarities, theater was the first ally of the new medium, which resulted in “Film d’art” (e.g. *The Assassination of the Duke of Guise* by Henri Lavedan, 1908). However, recording theater plays on tape did not become popular amongst viewers in the long run. Filmmakers themselves then began to speak, mostly representatives of the Russian avant-garde and the first film theoreticians. In the seminal *Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today* Sergei Einstein convincingly argues that the cinema owes such characteristic narrative-stylistic techniques as parallel editing, “rhythmic harmony” and the mutual permeation of image and sound, to Dickens’s novels and Pushkin’s poems<sup>8</sup>. In Poland, a similar observation was made by Karol Irzykowski, who noticed similarities between the dramaturgy and literary narration in the works by David Wark Griffith (the montage sequence in *Way Down East*)<sup>9</sup>. In his opinion, “the cinema, as the youngest of the muses, has become like a common experimental area or a dumpster for other arts; before it catches up with its friends, it has to go through the phase of trial, imitation, epigonic”<sup>10</sup>.

With time, after a period of turbulent assimilation processes, the cinema created its own, autonomous language of artistic expression, finally becoming a well-established and appreciated form of art. As André Bazin observes, by studying literature and imitating its techniques and narrative strategies, film undertook an invaluable “lesson in literary culture”, which inspired its emancipating aspirations and opened its way to a career in culture<sup>11</sup>. This thought was further developed by Maryla Hopfinger, who claimed that “literature and literary culture have become the major and the most obvious point of reference to film, a source of models and norms”. In her opinion, “patterns of literary culture made it easier for the cinema to take root in tradition and suggested that new communication practice a program of artistic and cultural promotion”<sup>12</sup>. Due to the development and expansion of audio-visual culture, pointed out by

<sup>8</sup> Siergiej Eisenstein, *Wybór pism* [A selection of essays], edited by R. Dreyer, Warszawa 1959.

<sup>9</sup> Karol Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta Muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina* [The tenth muse. Cinema’s aesthetic issues], Warszawa 1977, p. 125.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, s. 144.

<sup>11</sup> André Bazin, *O film nieczysty: obrona adaptacji* [For impure film: in defense of adaptation], in *Film i rzeczywistość* [Film and reality], translated by B. Michałek, Warszawa 1963, p. 85. Quoted after Anita Has-Tokarz, p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> Maryla Hopfinger, *Między reprodukcją a symulacją rzeczywistości. Problemy audiowizualności i percepcji* [Between reproduction and simulation of reality. Problems of audio-visuality and perception of reality], in *Od fotografii do rzeczywistości wirtualnej* [From photography to virtual reality], edited by M. Hopfinger, Warszawa 1997, p. 11.

Arnold Hauser, who deemed film to be the most representative form of modern art<sup>13</sup>, clear shifts have taken place in the relations between traditional media and in the conceptualization and role of literature itself. By becoming a more common medium and form of cultural activity than the book, film has partially taken away from literature its primary function: that of being a “mirror of reality” and a “storyteller”. However, it has not become the book’s surrogate, and it has not eradicated literature from the semiotic landscape. Both systems function in culture, complementing one another, and creating modern, complementary entities, characterized by innovative expression-semiotic possibilities<sup>14</sup>. Hence, we are dealing with the parallel development of the two arts – however, as explained by Jerzy Ziomek, it is unrelated, only affinal. This affinity points to the shared roots of literature and film, to some existing, natural symbiosis. At the same time, they display a mutual dialogue, a cultural co-existence, “sometimes a relationship out of choice, sometimes out of duty, sometimes out of love, sometimes out of sensibility”<sup>15</sup>. Janusz Plisiecki refers to it as “taking mutual advantage of the experiences”<sup>16</sup> of the two arts – maintaining their autonomy, but with the option of establishing a clear connection and affiliation<sup>17</sup>.

In general, in a reflection on the relationship between film and literature, the influence of literature on film is typically stressed, especially in the context of questions regarding (screen) adaptations. The opposite influence is rarely discussed, though examples of such relations have been observed since the very beginning of film. For example, Boris Eichenbaum (Russian formal school) saw film as an ally in the fight for a new literature, which he treated as “raw cinema”, looking for the potential for a film-like way of thinking in it<sup>18</sup>. Karol Irzykowski also saw a “photogenic” beauty in literature, even before the invention of film (*Maria* by Malczewski, *Ludzie bezdomni* by Żeromski, *Les Misérables* by Hugo, *Nana* by Zola, *Iliad* by Homer, etc.). At the same time, he states that Lessing, by separating poetry from painting, pushed it towards cinema. “Goethe and Schiller followed Lessing’s advice: the famous cinematic scene from *The Diver* by Schiller, in which first an arm emerges from water, then there is the white nape of the diver, and finally the second hand holding the royal cup found in the abyss in a gesture of triumph”<sup>19</sup>. Later, despite the clear tendencies to maintain the peculiar and cliquish character of particular works of art, this way of thinking lost popularity. André Bazin appreciated cinematography’s input in the revival of literature<sup>20</sup>, whereas Jan Białostocki credited it was invigorating the visual arts in general. He observed that “literature operates on different signs than art. It takes place in different dimensions, yet on the surface of motifs, themes,

<sup>13</sup>Arnold Hauser, *Spółeczna historia sztuki i literatury* [Social history of art and literature], volume 1-2, translated by J. Ruszczyćówna, Warszawa 1974, s. 382.

<sup>14</sup>See Anita Has-Tokarz, p. 108-109.

<sup>15</sup>Jerzy Ziomek, *Powinowactwa literatury. Studia i szkice* [Literature’s affiliations. Studies and sketches], Warszawa 1980, s. 89.

<sup>16</sup>Janusz Plisiecki, *Przemiany w kulturze współczesnej* [Transformations in contemporary culture], in *Film i sztuki tradycyjne* [Film and traditional arts], Lublin 1999, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup>See also René Wellek, p. 175-176.

<sup>18</sup>Boris Eichenbaum, *Literatura i kino* [Literature and cinema], in *Szkice o prozie i poezji* [Sketches on prose and poetry], translated by R. Zimand, Warszawa 1973.

<sup>19</sup>Karol Irzykowski, p. 141. Quoted after Joanna Kuźnicka, *Ut pictura poesis*, “Prace Naukowe. Pedagogika” 1999-2000-2001, No 8-9-10, p. 910-911.

<sup>20</sup>André Bazin, op. cit.

symbols it may and does have relationships with the visual arts”<sup>21</sup>. The fact that the evolution of literature under the influence of film was also observed by artists, theoreticians and publicists of the interwar period, such as Anatol Stern, Stefania Zahorska or Jan Brzękowski<sup>22</sup>, is also significant for the following considerations. This, together with the change in the status of the addressee and participant in culture, and the increasing circulation of popular literature, created extensive opportunities for the analysis and interpretation of the evolution of contemporary film and literature.

## From the sociology of culture

In order to discuss conscious, representative borrowings, or – more broadly – how literature is inspired by film, apart from purely formal aspects, the communicative practice between the creator and the recipient, and a socio-cultural diagnosis of a given time and place should also be taken into consideration. Ernst H. Gombrich observes that no culture can be fully conceptualized, and at the same time, no element of that culture can be conceptualized, in isolation<sup>23</sup>. In terms of the sociology of culture and the relationships between literature and film, it can be understood as an engagement of literature and film – complex, peculiar and characteristic – within one audiovisual cultural formation<sup>24</sup>.

In Poland, the interwar period met those conditions to a great extent. It was the period when Poland’s borders were being formed, uniting not only the land, but also the whole nation – after many years of partition, the Polish people regained the opportunity to construct their own state, with its own politics and culture. At the same time, Poland – as a new European state – participated in massive civilizational, social, and cultural transformations, which affected the entire European continent. Revolutionary movements and technological developments produced mass culture and changes in the perception of people as individuals. In art, this resulted in numerous avant-garde movements, which criticized tradition and conventions, while at the same time looking for new means of expression. Literary cafés, reviews, cabarets developed then, as well as new media, especially film and radio, which emerged thanks to technological developments and new communication technologies.

All these changes put literature in new contexts. Compared to film, it sometimes seemed less attractive, associated with artistic conservatism by the new type of addressee. In answer to this

<sup>21</sup>Jan Białostocki, *Słowo i obraz* [Word and picture], in *Słowo i obraz: materiały Sympozjum Komitetu Nauk o Sztuce PAN* [Word and picture: materials of the Symposium of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Scientific Committee on Art], edited by A. Morawińska, Warszawa 1982, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup>Anatol Stern, *U źródeł nowej estetyki* [At the source of the new aesthetics], in *Poezja zbuntowana* [Rebelled poetry], Warszawa 1964, p. 267-515; Stefania Zahorska, *Co powieść zawdzięcza filmowi?* [What novel owes poetry], “Kurier Literacko-Naukowy” 1934, No 29; Jan Brzękowski, *Film a nowa poezja* [Film and new poetry], “Wiadomości Literackie” 1933, No 28.

<sup>23</sup>Ernst H. Gombrich, *W poszukiwaniu historii kultury* [In the search of history of culture], translated by A. Dębicki, in *Pojęcia, problemy, metody współczesnej nauki o sztuce* [Notions, problems, methods of modern science of art.], edited by J. Białostocki, Warszawa 1976, p. 336.

<sup>24</sup>For more on that topic, see Maryla Hopfinger’s *Kultura współczesna – audiowizualność* [Modern culture – audio-visuality], Warszawa 1985; *Kultura audiowizualna u progu XXI wieku* [Audio-visual culture in late 20th century], Warszawa 1997 and *Doświadczenia audiowizualne: o mediach w kulturze współczesnej* [Audio-visual experiences: on media in contemporary culture], Warszawa 2003.

problem, attempts at reviving it by correspondence with other forms of art and media (mostly film) were made. Initially, this relation was based on rather random relationships between those two forms of art. One example of writers' early interest in film included popularization and criticism, as well as the formal relationships between the two found in many examples. This involved numerous poets and writers. Among others, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński and Roman Kołoniecki wrote about actors and film characters; Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Witold Wandurski employed film techniques; however, the futurists and Skamander-related poets (later also the Kraków Avant-garde) displayed the strongest tendencies in these terms. Both older writers (Karol Irzykowski), and younger ones (Antoni Słonimski, Anatol Stern), as well as members of the Kraków Avant-Garde (Peiper, Kurek, Brzękowski) were film critics and theoreticians.

The 1930s brought changes in terms of cooperation between writers and filmmakers. Appreciation of the role of the writer-screenwriter in the filmmaking process and the common ideological foundations of representatives of the two forms of art (the literary group "Przedmieście" [suburb] and the Warsaw "START") facilitated closer cooperation. For example, Zofia Nałkowska, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, and Anatol Stern became screenwriters (Stern being the most successful of the three), Waław Sieroszewski and Ferdynand Goetel became producers ("Panta-Film" production company), and pre-war songwriters also became involved in film, such as Julian Tuwim (lyrics to songs from *Szpieg w masce* [Spy in a mask] by Mieczysław Krawicz, 1933) and Marian Hemar (songs from *Na Sybir* [to Siberia] by Henryk Szaro, 1930, *Panienka z poste-restante* [A girl from poste-restante] by Jan Nowina-Przybylski and Michał Waszyński, 1935).

Formal inspirations with film techniques are a separate category. The time for an uncritical awe of film was already gone, replaced by conscious borrowings of cinematic means of expression. Various film novels started to appear (Jan Brzękowski: *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* [Professor Mueller's bankruptcy], 1931, *Psychoanalitik w podróży* [Psychoanalyst on the go], 1929), as well as film-inspired poems (Adam Ważyk, Jan Brzękowski). Writers moved from theory to practice: Jalu Kurek – *Obliczenia rytmiczne* [Rhythmic calculations] ("OR"), 1932, and Stefan Themerson (together with Franciszka Themerson) – *Apteka* [Pharmacy], 1930, *Europa*, 1931-1932, *Drobiazg melodyjny* [Melodic little something], 1934, *Przygoda człowieka poczciwego* [A decent man's adventure], 1938.

The presence of cinema in interwar literature is not only an artistic fact, but to a great extent, a phenomenon that can be seen in terms of Polish cultural sociology of that time. According to Stefan Żółkiewski, a literary text is a social document:

A work of art can be studied as a manifestation of author's social awareness or a manifestation of their ideology, and indirectly – as a manifestation of consciousness or ideology, especially those coherently expressed, of specific classes or smaller social groups<sup>25</sup>.

Canned food will be left in a lead tin.  
Slippery nitrate film. "Paramount" journal.

<sup>25</sup>Stefan Żółkiewski, *Kultura. Socjologia. Semiotyka literacka. Studia* [Culture. Sociology. Literary semiotics. Studies], Warszawa 1979, p. 445.

Jump from the fifteenth floor. A new tank. Maeuvers.

A genuine Chinese corpse from the Manchu front<sup>26</sup>.

Słonimski, "Dokument epoki" [Epoch's document])

Film inspirations in literature are thus a social fact, and the contents of these books – a picture of their times. For they bring new qualities to culture, related to narrative, fictional, and genealogical transformations. A fascination with the new medium oftentimes manifested itself directly:

- as admiration for novelty:

(...) it has become springy – summer is rushing through white-snowy autumnness

CINEMATOGRAPH, CINEMATOGRAPH, CINEMATOGRAPH, CINEMATOGRAPH<sup>27</sup>.

(S. Młodożeniec, "XX wiek")

- as poetic inspiration:

(...)ineffable, otherworldly beauty of

Cinematographer<sup>28</sup>.

(J. Jankowski, "Maggi")

- as an element of an ideological manifesto:

The best historian and geographer –

It is them –

Edison and Marconi –

The telephone and the cinematographer!...

Guzzle the Pacific Ocean

And spit on war!...<sup>29</sup>

(S. Młodożeniec, "Hymn pokoju" [A peace hymn])

Another social fact was that the cinema constituted the only form of entertainment and relaxation and participation in culture for a typical Polish person

<sup>26</sup> W puszcze z łowiu zostaną konserwy.

Śliska błona filmowa. Dziennik "Paramountu".

Skok z piętnastego piętra. Nowy tank. Manewry.

Prawdziwy trup Chińczyka z mandżurskiego frontu.

<sup>27</sup> (...) zawiośniało – lato pędzi przez jesienność białośnieżnie

KINEMATOGRAF, KINEMATOGRAF, KINEMATOGRAF.

<sup>28</sup> (...) niewysłowione, nadziemskie piękno

Kinematografu.

<sup>29</sup> Najlepsi historyk i geograf –

To oni –

Edison i Marconi –

Telefon i kinematograf!...

Chłajcie Ocean Spokojny

I plujcie na wojnę!...

Between a column and a visit to the cinema,  
 On your way from a café and then the theater again<sup>30</sup>.  
 (Słonimski, "Lato w mieście" [summer in the city])

Oh kiosks, signboards, merchants, mailmen,  
 Squares, cyclists, cinema-shows!<sup>31</sup>  
 (K. Wierzyński, "Lewa kieszeń" [Left pocket])

The increasingly critical approach of authors to film and the transformations it provoked in contemporary art was another phenomenon originating from the broadly understood sociology of culture. The trend for the cinema in literature, as a sociocultural phenomenon, underwent an evolution of sorts – from blind fascination to satirical criticism<sup>32</sup>.

(...) they don't see anything  
 Don't hear anything  
 Pathè freres – they are just common cheap advertisers<sup>33</sup>  
 (S. Młodożeniec, "Kino")

Pause pause they are carrying cakes  
 Hey Mister, stop pushing and shoving  
 Stop leaning against me  
 The lights are still on  
 The drama is hiding its secrets  
 Is he alive? Is he dead?  
 A tart is laughing in the loge seating  
 Film dust nerves some mud<sup>34</sup>.  
 (T. Czyżewski, "Sensacja w kinie" [sensation in the cinema])

Oh can oh can it be  
 That we are only moved by a cistern of moisture

<sup>30</sup> Pomiędzy felietonem a pójściem do kina,  
 W drodze między kawiarnią i znowu teatrem.

<sup>31</sup> Ach kioski, szyldy, kupcy, listonosze,  
 Skwery, cykliści, kino-przedstawienia!

<sup>32</sup> See Ewa and Marek Pytaszow, *Poetycka podróż w świat kinematografu, czyli kino w poezji polskiej lat 1914-1925* [Poetic journey into the world of cinematographer – cinema in the Polish poetry of 1914-1925], in *Szkice z teorii filmu* [Sketches on film theory], edited by A. Helman and W. Godzic, Katowice 1978, 31-32.

<sup>33</sup> (...) nie widzą nic  
 Nie słyszą nic  
 Pathè freres – to zwyczajni tani reklamiarze

<sup>34</sup> Pauza pauza niosą ciasta  
 Niech pan zbytnio się nie szasta  
 Panie niech pan mnie nie gniece  
 Bo jeszcze światło się świeci  
 Dramat tajemnice kryje  
 Czy on umrze czy ożyje  
 W łóż śmieje się ko-ko-ta  
 Film kurz nerwy trochę błota.



Mia May

And Liliana Gish<sup>35</sup>?

(W. Wandurski, "Precz z kanarkami" [away with canaries])

I am quite certain, that you would be a top class film artist. Film is a huge thing. It gives unparalleled popularity. Finally, it is the only universal thetrum of the imagination – a place, where you will find it easiest to hook on humanity. (...) And thus your eternal wish will come true: for – Lucifer became a film artist. We all know him. It is Charlie Chaplin.

("Bezrobotny Lucyfer" [Lucipher unemployed] A. Wat)

Cinema is the disease of our times. Not money, not women, not Masonry, not governments ruling the world – everything is ruled by cinema.

(J. Kurek, "S.O.S.")

Cinema's demoralization is advancing quickly in the human soul. I would have those schools of evil, corruption and crime shut down.

(J. Wiktor, "Zwariowane miasto" [crazy city])

Authors inspired by film in the interwar Poland testify not only to the revolution which was taking place in art, but also (and maybe above all) they were proof of the transformations taking place in the worldview of individual artists, and in their visions of culture and contemporary urban civilization. From a sociocultural perspective this fact showed the important role that the cinema played in that culture, as well as its rank as a form of art, which inspired and fascinated Polish intellectual elites. The film-literature relation also highlighted other social phenomena which were also taking place in the cultural life of the interwar period. Both poetry and prose from that time can be treated as documents of the epoch of sorts, which exemplify certain clear social and artistic processes.

Based on these considerations it seems a good idea to investigate specific formal solutions, which exemplify the so-called cinematicity of literature, and manifest themselves as modeling literary structure on film structure<sup>36</sup> in terms of the plot, narrative and genealogical surfaces. It should also be stressed that they concern a concise, coherent and representative cultural formation, limited to the Polish interwar period (1918-1939).

### Fictional relations<sup>37</sup>

Due to the clarity of their occurrence, fictional relations are relatively the least troublesome. Jerzy Ziomek, referring to the category of plot, proposes the concept of a plot community of literature and film, which has an interdisciplinary and extra-systemic character, which means that

<sup>35</sup>Czyżby już tylko czyż  
Wzruszać nas mogły cysterny wilgoci  
Mia May  
I Liliana Gish?

<sup>36</sup>The term "modelling of structures" was introduced by Maria Zeic-Piskorska, p. 174.

<sup>37</sup>Literary exemplifications and theses in this paper are inspired by my monograph – Wojciech Otto, *Literatura i film w kulturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Literature and film in the Polish interwar culture], Poznań 2007.

the same plot can be told using the language of literature, film, or theater. It offers broad opportunities for the co-occurrence of specific motifs in works representing different artistic areas<sup>38</sup>.

In the interwar period writers who showed film inspirations in their works, seldom employed a well-formed and coherent poetic program, taking advantage of the richness of film's forms of expression rather occasionally and randomly. They became interested not only in specific films or selected motifs, but also in certain plot schemes (both in commercial and artistic films), and the broad world of cinema, functioning as film terms in a metalinguistic function.

Shaky shadows stepped down the *screen*,  
 Sleepy film tape is sleeping on a circle.  
 White canvas is somewhere in the front,  
 Hopeless roles finished,  
 You can now smile sadly  
 Make-up washed off, wiped away,  
 Powder removed from the hair, from the head.  
 ...Chaplin has a beautiful, young face  
 And he is real, *celuloid*<sup>39</sup>.  
 (Słonimski, "Film")

The sources of these inspirations differed from one another, starting with a fascination with the cinema and its criticism, through wishing to make literature more attractive for the masses, and finally discovering new possibilities offered by film. In Polish interwar literature, the world of film found its reflection in the form of contemporary cinema's descriptions, pictures from film sets, descriptions of film crews. Film-specific objects were often introduced to plots. Props, things and objects strictly related to film constitute a separate category. Introducing them to the represented world allowed authors to create new realities. Sometimes it was a land of the impossible, of surreal imagination, and sometimes – the land of a modern civilization or the world of dreams, wonder and magic.

From the fair of hubbub, where parrots are yelling  
 From tattooed arms of sailor,  
 Faces veiled in darkness  
 On pavements, roofs, the already liquid procession.  
 Wake up! You have been asleep for too long, push away the wooden lid, -  
 (...) let trapezes dance!

<sup>38</sup> Jerzy Ziomek, *Powinowactwa przez fabułę* [Relations through plot], in *Powinowactwa literatury...*, p. 10-11.

<sup>39</sup> Zeszły z ekranu cienie chwiejne,  
 Taśma omdlała śpi na kole.  
 Na wprost majaczy blade płótno,  
 Skończone beznadziejne role,  
 Uśmiechnąć się już można smutno  
 Zmyty, wytarty maquillage,  
 Puder wstrząśnięty z włosów, z głowy.  
 ...Chaplin ma piękną, młodą twarz  
 I jest prawdziwy, celuloidowy.

A sleeping harlequin and a somnambulist<sup>40</sup>.

(A. Słonimski, "Negatyw" [negative])

The land is disappearing, chimneys and towers are disappearing, we are alone. It is so quiet that you can almost hear the cold and slippery stones stuck in the ground. I am walking and I do not know whether it is the wind blowing in my ears, the rhythm of my steps through corridors... Nature. I do not want nature, people are nature. Miętus, let us go back, I prefer the cinematograph's crowd to the ozone of fields.

(W. Gombrowicz, "Ferdydurke")

And in the meantime the doctor (a local Sapocolanca of a sort) amused (God damn it) Perdita. It does not make any sense at all, although the doctor's moustache very much resemble an actor...

(J. Brzękowski, "24 kochanków Perdity Loost" [24 lovers of Perdita Loost])

The engineer had old-fashioned binoculars on a black silk string, as if borrowed from the "Battle-ship Potemkin" "

(B. Jasieński, "Człowiek zmienia skórę" [a man changes his skin])

In literature, contemporary film stars were the most frequently described element of the film world. Their presence in the represented world of a work of literature was subjected to several basic aims. Many authors – and it should be noted that not second-rate class ones – followed the trend of writing paeans to actors. For example, Julian Tuwim expressed his awe for the American film star, Liliana Gish (*List pt. "Liebesleid"* [A letter entitled Liebesleid]), Konstanty Ildefon Gałczyński compared Greta Garbo to an angel (*Ludowa zabawa* [A folk play]) and Antoni Słonimski wrote about Gloria Swanson (*Głos Glorii Swanson* [Gloria Swanson's voice]).

She felt like a sister of that little American, Liliana Gish, and just like her she could not hold back her tears, running along through the streets of London.

("Torpeda czasu" [a torpedo of time], A. Słonimski)

Introducing film motifs to literature was also an opportunity for commenting on contemporary cultural and civilizational transformations. In this way, writers contributed to the discussion on (among others): the quality of Polish cinematography, the sound breakthrough and its consequences for film, and finally the audience and film-related threats.

Eve was standing naked,  
Eve was standing speechless,  
Her hand was talking, her leg was talking –  
What was absent was present.  
(...) Eve was standing white –  
The eye lens was shining under the diaphragm of eyelids.

<sup>40</sup> Z jarmarku gwary, gdzie krzyczą papugi  
W tatuowanych rękach marynarzy, Owianych mrokiem twarzy  
Na trotuarach, dachach, już płynny korowód.  
Obudź się! Śpisz za długo, zwał drewniane wieko, -  
(...) Niech się roztańczę trapezy!  
Arlekin śpiący i somnambulik.

Eve ate a fruit,  
 Eve ate a word fruit,  
 Desired by her sense of pleasure<sup>41</sup>.  
     Stern, "Pierwszy grzech" [original sin])

For the love of God, sit down, Sir  
 Mia May is falling out of a window  
 She is going to die  
 She is already dead, she is already dead  
 She is fine, she is getting up, getting up (...)  
 Four servants are carrying her<sup>42</sup>  
     (T. Czyżewski, "Sensacja w kinie" [sensation in the cinema])

Oh, looking at the stars kissing us,  
 At a certain moment after the tenth Clicot,  
 We will suddenly see the world upside down,  
 As if it was a negative of Pathè & CO<sup>43</sup>.  
     (B. Jasiński, "Rzygające posągi" [puking statues])

Pathè freres see everything and hear everything (...)  
 So the united troops review (...)  
 And Wilson's wife in a national petticoat  
 Hooray hooray  
 And Paderewski's fingers –  
 And a St. Bernard –  
 Everything is here<sup>44</sup>  
     (S. Młodożeniec, "Kino" [cinema])

<sup>41</sup> Ewa stała naga,  
 Ewa stała niema,  
 Mówiła ręka, mówiła noga –  
 Było to, czego nie ma.  
 (...) Ewa stała biała –  
 Obiektyw oka skrzył pod powiek diafragmą.  
 Ewa zjadła owoc,  
 Ewa zjadła owoc słowa,  
 Którego jej zmysł rozkoszy pragnął.

<sup>42</sup> Na miły Bóg niech Pan siada  
 Mia May z okna wypada  
 Ona pewnie się zabije  
 Już nie żyje, już nie żyje  
 Nic jej nie jest, wstaje wstaje (...)  
 Czterej niosą ją lokaje

<sup>43</sup> A, wpatrując się w gwiazdy całujące się z nami,  
 W pewnym dzikim momencie po dziesiątym Clicot,  
 Zobaczymy raptownie świat do góry nogami,  
 Jak na filmie odwrotnym firmy Pathè & CO.

<sup>44</sup> Pathè freres wszystko widzą i wszystko słyszą (...)  
 Więc zjednoczonych przegląd wojsk (...)  
 I żona Wilsona w narodowej halce  
 Hurra hurra  
 I Paderewskiego palce –  
 I saint-bernardski pies –  
 Wszystko jest.

## Narrative relations

Both film and literature from the Polish interwar period show mutual narrative relations, and in some cases – direct inspirations. In literature, film is present as a set of certain narrative forms, visualization techniques, and stage presentation. As an early 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural phenomenon it had a great impact on the understanding of the categories of time and space, introducing shortcuts and the freedom of imagination, dramatic dynamism and movement<sup>45</sup>. However, a clear explanation of the co-dependencies between particular narrative techniques is difficult. Film – an art form which had been present for only several decades in the interwar period – constructed its language eclectically, taking advantage of achievements of other forms of art, mostly literature. It assimilated certain elements of language, transformed them and showed them in a new light – consequently, some techniques which have been functioning in literature for a long time are often considered to be film's achievements. The pace, changing movement and rhythm, freedom in operating time and space – a specific way of visualizing the world – all soon became the cinema's attributes, and if they did appear in other forms of art, they were considered to have been inspired by film. It should be said that in many cases this was true, since film contributed to the development of literature's self-awareness, making authors realize literature's broad artistic possibilities<sup>46</sup>. Examples illustrating the fact that both forms of art developed (to some extent) in parallel (works by James Joyce or Dos Passos) should also be mentioned here. Anyhow, those inspirations did exist. Authors related to the Cracow Avant-garde or futurism acknowledged them; certain signals could also be found in individual works containing subtitles referring to the cinema, or using motifs and plot schemes suggesting film inspirations. It should be noted that already in the interwar period, perhaps even more so than today, these relations were noticed by theoreticians and critics of literature, who appreciated the great role its played in the shaping of this new poetic language: a language accommodating mass audiences and modern culture<sup>47</sup>.

The Narrative relations between literature and film can be divided into three groups: temporal, spatial and spatiotemporal, thus pointing to three directions and ways in which literature was transformed under the influence of film.

In many works, freedom in terms of operating time, which was arbitrarily shortened and broken into pieces, came to the fore. Typical examples include works by Jan Brzękowski, Jalu Kurek, Adam Ważyk, Jerzy Andrzejewski, Michał Choromański and Tadeusz Peiper. All of them displayed clear inspirations from film, signaled directly in subtitles (*Bankructwo profesora Muellera. Powieść sensacyjno-filmowa* [Professor Mueller's bankruptcy. A sensational-film novel]), through plot elements referring to cinema (*Andrzej Panik morderca Amundsena* [Andrzej Panik – Amundsen's murderer], *Triumwirat* [Triumvirate], *Psychoanalitik w podróży* [Psychoanalyst on the go]), and clear analogies between literary and film structures (*Zazdrość*

<sup>45</sup>See for example Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Od czystej formy do literatury faktu. Główne teorie i programy literackie dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [From pure form to non-fiction literature. Major literary theories and programs], Warszawa 1974, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup>Alina Madej arrives at similar conclusions, *Miedzy filmem a literaturą. Szkice o powieści filmowej* [Between film and literature. Sketches on film novel], in *Film polski wobec innych sztuk* [Polish film and other arts], edited by A. Helman i A. Madej, Katowice 1979, p. 106-108.

<sup>47</sup>See for example Karol Irzykowski, *Futuryzm a szachy* [Futurism and chess], "Ponowa" 1921, No 1.

*i medycyna* [Jealousy and medicine], *Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach* [Scandal in Wesołe Bagniska]), or authors' biographies and their relationships with film<sup>48</sup>.

Prose is characterized by a peculiar temporal fragmentation of the motifs it describes; they do not stem from each other, but rather are connected via associations or against the background of a film motif which organizes the whole work. An example of this is *Andrzej Panik morderca Amundsena*, in which the story of the titular protagonist stems from a film seen in the cinema and a friendship with a person who is the porte-parole of the author, who sometimes writes film reviews. This motif is transformed into the idea of catastrophism in another novel by Kurek, *S.O.S.*, in which each subplot is connected by characters (but not in every place), and the author introduces separate episodes to the narration, including one with Lina Gorzelska and Charlie Chaplin. The resulting composition has a mosaic-like structure – although the time when the story takes place is stated, the temporal relations between individual events are unclear<sup>49</sup>. Other authors represented time in even more complex ways. Jan Brzękowski arbitrarily organizes particular subplots, sometimes slowing the action down, sometimes speeding it up, as well as using combinations of pictures based on associations. He also refers to the cinematic poetry of the silent cinema in its action version, dominated by dynamic plot twists, a quickened pace of action, the simultaneity of the presentation of events, and frequent ellipses based on series of visual associations. However, it was Michał Choromański who incorporated the most interesting conceptualizations of time in his prose. He played a game with time of sorts, based on ellipsis, turns, transitions and temporal simultaneity in the presentation of events, in his famous novel *Zazdrość i medycyna*. In another work, *Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach*, he composed the plot on the basis of constantly repeated retrospections of tragic events from five years before, at the same time using simultaneity techniques and a whole range of sudden temporal jumps back and forth.

The daughter was wearing a white flounced dress, typical for little girls, and she had a flower behind her right ear – an aster.

There were bouquets of white asters in Wawicki's room. Rain was banging against the window. Wawicki was having a bath when Mr Apolinary knocked on the door.

(M. Choromański, "Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach")

On the other hand, spatial and spatiotemporal relations between literature and film mostly concerned loosening narrative rigors regarding the positivist novel model, with its linear plot and chronology of events. Temporal transitions and ellipses corresponded with dynamic plot twists, often ontologically related to film. Film revolutionized the understanding of the concept of space. Notions such as: static, unchangeable, uniform and simultaneous were replaced by "dynamic", "fluid", "limitless"<sup>50</sup>. According to Alina Madej, film set literature free from descriptiveness, and gave it rhythm, dynamics, and movement<sup>51</sup>, which manifested itself mostly through the dynamic changeability of pictures and

<sup>48</sup>Especially critical papers by Tadeusz Peiper, Jan Brzękowski and Jalu Kurek, as well as Jerzy Andrzejewski's screenwriting activities.

<sup>49</sup>For the influence of film on the construction of time in works by Jalu Kurek see Janusz Kucharczyk, *Pierwiastki filmowe w twórczości literackiej Tadeusza Peipera i Jalu Kurka* [Film elements in Tadeusz Peiper's and Jalu Kurek's literature], „Kwartalnik Filmowy” 1965, No 1, p. 49-52.

<sup>50</sup>A. Hutnikiewicz, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>51</sup>A. Madej, op. cit., p. 108.



unannounced changes of places of action, according to film montage rules based on a system of loose associations. Moreover, visualization of description was used both in prose and poetry, presented through a camera lens, employed in the description of gradation of film sets and camera moves, and applying simultaneity and film montage techniques. Some significant examples:

- Gradation of film sets:

(...) kisses from Florida  
 English names  
 Under a starry banner  
 A Blackman is playing banjo  
 We are dancing, have you just taken me in your *arms*  
 We are dancing  
 Have I thrown my arms *around your neck*<sup>52</sup>  
 (M. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, "Fokstrot")

- Methods of film-like visualization:

A young woman is sewing something  
 In silence, she is sewing something white with lace.  
 Subtitle:  
 You know, I thought this would be for our little one.  
 Two big drops,  
 Most sacred,  
 Are rolling down her face,  
 Hang down from the neck,  
 Pipe smoke,  
 Scared silence<sup>53</sup>  
 (W. Wandurski, "Kino – Dramat")

<sup>52</sup> (...) pocałunki z Florydy  
 Angielskie imiona  
 Pod gwiazdzistą banderą  
 Murzyn w banjo bije  
 Tańczymy czy pan chwycił mnie nagle w *ramiona*  
 Tańczymy  
 Czy rzuciłam się panu *na szyję*

<sup>53</sup> Młoda kobieta coś szyje.  
 W milczeniu szyje coś białego z koronkami.  
 Napis:  
 Wiesz, myślałam, że to będzie dla naszego maleńkiego.  
 Dwie krople duże,  
 Najświętsze,  
 Płyną rowkami twarzy,  
 Wisną na szyi.  
 Dym z fajki,  
 Cisza trwożna.

- Techniques taken from the poetics of a screenplay

An evening,  
 A happy pilgrim, clothed in a forest  
 Is standing in front of a village. He is dug in. He is waiting. (...)  
 A day,  
 Beaten up, he is blushing, staggering, he wants to escape. He escapes.  
 He proclaims red shame, an afterglow of failure, to clouds<sup>54</sup>.  
 (J. Kurek, "Bitwa dnia z nocą" [a battle between night and day])

Franciscan church. Sunday. 10 a.m.  
 Panik is standing in his Sunday best, leaning against a confessional on the right side of the nave.  
 (J. Kurek, "Andrzej Panik morderca Amundsena")

A cold night.  
 Evil.  
 Terrific. Blackish. Coldish.  
 You cannot see even a grass leaf,  
 It is pouring,  
 A policeman-extra...<sup>55</sup>  
 (B. Jasiński, "Miasto" [city])

- Film montage techniques:

Mornings are turning into afternoons, just like people come through gates  
 Come into the day, squeeze into a suffering church,  
 Like a hand squeezing into a hand, when we say goodbye<sup>56</sup>.  
 (J. Kurek, "Oda do słońca" [ode to the sun])

- Simultaneity:

"Meanwhile..." – as they say in films.  
 Meanwhile a few meters to the south-west, in Wilmersdorf, in a big brick house (second gate, en-

<sup>54</sup> Wieczór,  
 Radosny pielgrzym, przyodziały lasem  
 Stoi przed wsią. Okopał się. Czeka. (...)  
 Dzień,  
 Pobity, rumieni się, słania, chce uciec. Ucieka.  
 Czerwony wstyd, łunę kłęski, obwieszczając chmurom.

<sup>55</sup> Noc zimna.  
 Zła.  
 Przejmująca. Czerniawa. Chłodnista.  
 Nie widać ani żdźbła,  
 Deszcz leje jak z cebra,  
 Na rogu policjant statysta...

<sup>56</sup> Ranki wchodzą w południa, jak ludzie wchodzą w bramy  
 Wejść w dzień, wciśnij się w kościół cierpiący,  
 Jak dłoń wciska się w dłoń, kiedy się żegnamy.

trance through the yard), in one of the third-floor appartments, on a palliasse on the floor a man is sitting (the same man whom Relich curses in his thoughts) and is peacefully taking off his shoes.

(B. Jasieński, "Zmowa obojętnych" [a conspiracy of the indifferent])

When describing the narrative relations between literature and film of the Polish interwar period, one will surely notice that they were highly complex and abundant with interesting artistic projects. Temporal narrative techniques concerned freedom in terms of operating time. Conceptualizations of literary space were designed using film means, bearing in mind mostly elements of visualization and the poetics of the cinematic image: camera moves and film sets. The spatiotemporal aspects of narration were enriched with film montage techniques, the poetics of the screenplay, and narrative simultaneity. Such relations with film were supposed to be a way to make literature more attractive for a mass audience, a form of deconstructing old, archaic narrative schemes, as well as the authors' expression of the innovative poetic program.

## Genological relations

Social (viewers' expectations), civilizational (technological development, new media), and aesthetic (relationships between literature and film) phenomena can be form-making stimuli in terms of genology. The emergence of film and its broad influence, also in terms of literary genology, took place in all the aspects listed above. As a new medium and a symbol of modernity, as well as a form of art characterized by the greatest social impact, film became one of the most important sources of genological inspiration in the Polish interwar literature. According to Grażyna Szymczyk-Kluszczyńska, film became a catalyst for the transformation of literary forms<sup>57</sup>, contributing to the creation of new genres, but also to a revolution in ways of thinking about genealogy in general, postulating heterogeneity and syncretism.

Every epoch is driven by avant-garde movements that determine its characteristics and specificity in terms of themes, narration and genre. Systematic anti-traditionalism and innovativeness forced artists to seek new forms of expression. New media, including film, became one potential possibility; with its peculiar poetics of synchrony of rhythm, film dynamized the transformation process of literary narrative methods. Words started to function in new cultural variants, in the context of increasingly popular journalism, against the background of a developing popular literature – comprehensively and modernly employed by the cinema and radio. This fact made writers realize the possibilities and potential power of its influence, dependent on its relationships with other forms of art, especially film. Seeing common ground with the viewer-reader, and a shared perspective on originality and innovativeness, avant-garde artists used genological formulas borrowed from the cinema in their literary work increasingly often. As a result, the following genres rooted in literary traditions emerged: the film novel, film story, film novella, film romance, film play; literature also assimilated film's lexicon: screenplay, cinematograph, adventure film, and strange, novel combinations arose: cinema-drama, onscreen shadows, electro-cinema-aero-drama, a novel transformed into a film.

<sup>57</sup>Grażyna Szymczyk-Kluszczyńska, *Opowiadam? Opisuję? (Poeci-surrealiści wobec kina)* [Am I telling a story? Am I describing?] (Surrealist poets and the cinema)], in *Małe formy narracyjne*, edited by E. Loch, Lublin (no date), p. 102.

Artists who ideologically distanced themselves from tradition and searched for new means of expression – futurists, representatives of the *Almanach Nowej Sztuki* [new art almanac] and the Kraków Avant-garde – played the most significant role in the shaping of the new poetics and genealogy of literature. Postulating the dynamization of art and innovativeness of content and form, they created works which reflected the structure of film, its plot and narrative elements in different ways. As a result, the following interwar literary genres emerged: film novel, film story (*raconté*), screenplay, film poem, poetic cinematographer. The following artists experimented with such forms: Jan Brzękowski, Jalu Kurek, Tadeusz Peiper, Adam Ważyk, Bruno Jasiński, Stanisław Młodożeniec, Tytus Czyżewski, Anatol Stern, and others.

The film novel was the most popular among artists. According to Alina Madej, it situated itself atop a triangle comprised of popular literature and commercial film<sup>58</sup>. This contributed to the depreciation of the film novel as a form of art, and comparisons to subgenres of mass culture. The fact that the film novel had an extensive long prose formula enriched with elements borrowed from film poetics and popular culture was constructive for the genre. It was characterized by use of the conventions of film screenplays, montage techniques, and a film-like presentation of the represented world; it also featured onirism and phantasmagoria, motifs and fictional allusions from the circle of the cinema, and themes associated with low culture, such as eroticism, drug addiction, occultism and Eastern culture. Jan Brzękowski's *Psychoanalitik w podróży* and Jalu Kurek's *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* are representatives of the genre.

Among the many ways that interwar literature assumed a more film-like character, *film raconté* (i.e. film story) had the closest ties with cinematography (apart from the screenplay). The term refers to an epic work based on an already existing film or screenplay. According to Barbara Mruklik, the direct reason behind the development of this genre was the emergence of film propaganda in the late 1920s, when *film raconté* – an extensive summary illustrated with numerous publicity shots – was treated as one form of advertising films<sup>59</sup>. It later developed into a form of popular literature, read in order to better remember an already seen film and relive that experience. Moreover, it contributed to standardizing the narrative possibilities of film, stabilizing its significance in culture, and educating viewers who grew up in the times of literature and print<sup>60</sup>.

There are four kinds of *film raconté*, depending on the function of a given example, as well as its author's ambitions. The first type is a summary dominated by photos, resembling a comic book; the second one is a screenplay turned into a narrative form, whose function is mainly to reinforce the screening room experience; the third one corresponds with a screenplay proper, and has the character of a film story, i.e. it is written on the basis of an already existing film, a documentary material; and finally the fourth one is a form of creative interpretation of what a given film presented. Polish interwar realizations mostly fall

<sup>58</sup>Alina Madej, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>59</sup>Barbara Mruklik, *Raconté*, "Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich" [Dictionary of literary genres], volume IV, z. 2, p. 207-208.

<sup>60</sup>Grażyna Szymczyk-Kluszczyńska, op. cit., p. 103.

into the second and third category. Only Leo Belmont's *Człowiek, z którego świat się śmieje* [Man who the world laughs at] (1928), in which he refers to Chaplin's *Circus* in a creative, literary way, stands out due to its ambitious character. Belmont's originality and influence manifest themselves mostly in the extensive pre-action and epilogue whose aim is to outline the biography of the main protagonist, as well as in an innovative conceptualization of the novel's time, introduction of meta-textual motifs, psychological analysis, and discussion of comic issues.

Other genres, such as the film poem or poetic cinematographs, were on the outskirts of inter-war artistic activity. They did not play an important culture-forming role – they were rather a means of expression reflecting the interests of individual creators who referred to surrealism (Jan Brzękowski, Adam Ważyk), displayed inspirations from Italian futurism (Jalu Kurek), or sought fulfillment in genre experiments (Stefan K. Gacki, Stanisław Grędziński). Similarly to the European tradition, their works had an open, unconventional character, as a creative transposition of genological principles, with a strong influence of the author. Film techniques such as the subjectification of a character's perspective (in an alcohol- or drug-induced trance, or in a dream), the relativity and indeterminacy of time and space, the construction of reality based on association montage, simultaneity, the employment of film visualization techniques) deserve attention. Jalu Kurek's (*Gołębie Winicji Claudel* [Winicja Claudel's pigeons], 1924) and Jan Brzękowski's (*Montparnasse*, 1928) works are the most successful representatives of the genre.

[...] I am drinking my aperitif: dubonnet avec citron  
 A sack with eternity  
 I am staring at Seuphor's Flemish vigor  
 at his scarf, painted by Sonia Delaunay  
 we are talking about new tracks  
 of poetry  
 (a restaurant at the top of Eiffel Tower  
 dishes have to be selected)  
 and here is Paul Dermeé against Claudel and surrealists  
 at the same time  
 I am smiling at Céline Arnould's ashen face  
 a balloon of smoke<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> (...) piję swój aperitif: dubonnet avec citron  
 worek z wiecznością  
 wpatruję się w flamandzką tężyznę Seuphora  
 w jego szal malowany przez Sonię Delaunay  
 mówimy o nowych torach  
 poezji  
 (restauracja na szczycie Eiffła  
 trzeba wybierać potrawy)  
 a oto Paul Dermeé występuje przeciw Claudelowi I surrealistom  
 równocześnie  
 uśmiecham się do popielatej twarzy Céline Arnould  
 balon dymu

Poetic cinematographs emerged from a natural need to enrich the dictionary of literary genres, favored especially by futurists. As Edward Balcerzan observes, they proposed such new terms as “poezy”, “namopaniki”, “futurostychny”, “futureski”, “futoryzje”, “syntezy” and “kinematografy”<sup>62</sup>. A unique type of poetic work resulted from the group’s activity – a recreation of onscreen reality as, literally, “a record of movement”<sup>63</sup>. An account of a film, its plot (complete, or a part of it), or an attempt at recreating the narrative structure of a film through poetic means, or – as a third possibility – a combination of the two, are some examples of such a record. In a way, they were written *post factum*, after seeing a given film, using a scene or the whole plot, or realizing a given fiction or film genre’s narrative model or type of cinematography. In the case of fiction, there is the so-called visualization of a short story, which – according to Tadeusz Brzozowski – is based on the liveliness and concreteness of representation<sup>64</sup>. Narration is typically conducted in the present tense, or (less frequently) past tense, however, the primacy of the screen version is signaled. Such poems as Julian Tuwim’s *Z kinematografu* [From cinematographer] (1920), *Cinema* (1927) by Tytus Czyżewski, *Koń w kinie* [Horse in the cinema] (1930) by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, and *Film amerykański* [American film] (1924) by Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska are examples of this genre in its pure form. The second type of poetic cinematographs are poems reflecting film’s narrative structures. Their story is of secondary importance here; the presented lyrical situation may have taken place onscreen, but it was the poet’s efforts to express film poetics through literary means that are of primary significance. For example, Brunon Jasieński’s *Morga* [Morgen] (1921) refers to the structure of a crime film:

A few curious stopped.  
They looked. They asked.  
You could hear individual words.  
A short, broken conversation,  
Conducted in whispered staccato...  
...25 years... Streetwalker...  
...with mercuric bichloride...entered the hallway.  
It was raining... raindrops banging against the roof...<sup>65</sup>

They lifted the stretcher.

<sup>62</sup>Edward Balcerzan, *Wstęp do Bruno Jasieńskiego: Utwory poetyckie, manifesty, szkice* [Introduction to Bruno Jasieński: Poetry, manifests, sketches], Kraków 1972, p. LXI-LXII.

<sup>63</sup>The name “poetic cinematographers” comes from the subtitle of one of Brunon Jasieński’s poems *Przejechali* (1920) and literally means “a record of movement”.

<sup>64</sup>Tadeusz Brzozowski, *Gra w psychoanalizę, czyli (de)konstrukcja podmiotu w “filmowo-fotograficznym” modelu poezji “Almanachu Nowej Sztuki”* [The psychoanalysis game i.e. (de)construction of subject in the “film-photographic” poetry model of *New Art Almanach*], in *Z problemów podmiotowości w literaturze polskiej XX wieku* [On issues of subjectivity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish literature], edited by M. Lalak, Szczecin 1993, p. 207.

<sup>65</sup>Przystanęło kilku ciekawych.  
Patrzyli. Pytali.  
Dolatywały pojedyncze słowa.  
Jakaś rozmowa urywana, krótka,  
Prowadzona ścisłym staccatem...  
... 25 lat ... prostytutka ...  
... sublimatem ...  
Podnieśli nosze. Weszli do sieni.  
Deszcz padał... krople tłukły o dach...



Poems which have a film-like narration and an assumed, possible or factual, account of the plot (or its part) of a film, are a combination of the two variants described above. For example, *Przejechali* [They have passed] by Brunon Jasieński is a short film scene of an unambiguous conversation between a maid and, most likely, a man, in a busy street, registered by a camera and dynamically put together:

A freckled maid in a white dotted blouse.  
Someone slender, classy.  
Will you come?... – “I can’t...”  
Hooop!!  
Cars. Platforms. Carriages<sup>66</sup>.

\* \* \*

The present paper stems from an awareness of clear correspondences, relations, and parallels between literature and film. The theoretical findings, together with the presented exemplifications, have confirmed suppositions regarding the complementary character of film and literature, and made it possible to precisely identify the so-called points of contact between the types of literary works of interest here, together with the character of those interactions. In conclusion:

- relationships between literature and film are of a parallel character,
- their mutual relations are varied and multi-faceted,
- the cinematicity of literature includes both indirect (community, homology) and direct (proper film-like character) references to film,
- a structural analysis of individual works of literature should also account for socio-cultural perspectives,
- film inspirations in literature can be considered from the perspective of plot, narration, and genealogy.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>66</sup>Edward Balcerzan observes that the poem has a poem-like character. See Edward Balcerzan, *Systemy i przemiany gatunkowe w liryce lat 1918-1939* [Systems and genre transformations in the poetry of 1918-1939], in *Problemy Literatury Polskiej lat 1890-1939* [Problems of the Polish literature of 1890-1939], Series II, edited by H. Kirchner and Z. Żabicki, Wrocław 1974, p. 180-181.

Piegowata służąca w białej bluzce w groszki.

Ktoś wysmukły, z rejerem. Przyjedziesz?... – „Nie mogę...”

Hooop!!

Samochody. Platformy. Dorożki

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# KEYWORDS

literature

film

INTERWAR PERIOD

**ABSTRACT:**

The present paper stems from an awareness of clear correspondences, relations, and parallels between literature and film. The theoretical findings and exemplifications presented in it allow one to precisely identify the so-called points of contact between film and literature, as well as the character of these interactions. Relationships between literature and film are of a parallel character, and their mutual relations are varied and multi-faceted. The cinematicity of literature can include both indirect (community, homology) and direct (proper film-like character) references to film. A structural analysis of individual works of literature should also account for socio-cultural perspectives, limited here to the period between 1918 and 1939. Film inspirations in literature can be considered from the perspective of plot, narration, and genology.

## HOMOLOGY OF STRUCTURES

## cinematicity of literature

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# Cinempoetry?

## Movement and *Photogénie* as Aesthetic Categories of the Poetic Avant-garde

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It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art *par excellence*, the cinema, is a book of pictures, the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of films. (...) [O]ne can predict the day when, the photograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have the freedom heretofore unknown.

G. Apollinaire, *The New Spirit and the Poets*<sup>1</sup>

The relations between avant-garde poetry and silent film, on which I shall focus, have been to a certain extent analyzed by Polish scholars. However, mainly film and culture studies scholars have examined this fascinating and complex issue, often from a historical or documentary

<sup>1</sup> Guillaume Apollinaire, *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York: New Directions, 1971), 228.



perspective, drawing on structuralism and semiotics.<sup>2</sup> Two complementary anthologies of film of the interwar period, by Jadwiga Bocheńska and Marcin Giżycki, respectively, which include numerous texts written by poets who were inspired by artistic cinema (and I will mostly refer to artistic cinema in my article), have played an invaluable role in this regard.<sup>3</sup> The Polish avant-garde had an acute “film awareness.”<sup>4</sup> Although Polish cinema of the interwar period mostly specialized in popular productions, especially melodramas and patriotic dramas, Polish audiences also watched experimental and avant-garde silent films from all around the world. Film as a theme was also very popular in the poetry of the interwar period; indeed, some poets had a very close relation with film.<sup>5</sup> Anatol Stern agreed to an experimental adaptation of *Europa* [Europe] by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson (1931-1932); Jalu Kurek, a spokesman for “pure cinema,” made one of the few Polish experimental films of the era, entitled *OR* (*Obliczenia rytmiczne* [Rhythmic calculations], 1932); Jerzy Brzękowski wrote the script for *Kobieta i koła* [Woman and circles] (1931) – though the movie was unfortunately never made.<sup>6</sup> Since Brzękowski was a member of the “a.r.” group, and author of many cinematic essays and reviews, Władysław Strzemiński encouraged him to write his own theoretical book on early

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the books that I refer to in my essay, the following authors have examined the relationships between Polish avant-garde poetry and cinema in more detail: Ewa and Marek Pytasz, *Poetycka podróż w świat kinematografu, czyli kino w poezji polskiej lat 1914-1925* [A poetic journey into the world of cinematography: Cinema in Polish poetry in the years 1914-1925], in: *Szkice z teorii filmu* [Essays on film theory], Alicja Helman and Tadeusz Miczka (eds.) (Katowice: Prace Naukowe UŚ, 1978), 18-32; J. Kucharczyk, *Pierwiastki filmowe w twórczości literackiej Tadeusza Peipera i Jalu Kurka* [Film elements in the literary works of Tadeusz Peiper and Jalu Kurek], *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 57,1 (1965). Recently, a brilliant book by Kamila Kuc has been published in English: *Visions of Avant-Garde Films: Polish Cinematic Experiments From Expressionism to Constructivism* (Indiana and Minneapolis: University of Indiana Press 2016). Rafał Koshany wrote about cinema in poetry after 1945. Marcin Giżycki, pointing to similar references, writes that “the influence of cinema on Polish poetry has been discussed extensively;” however, I think that there is still more to discover in this regard, the more so as this topic has been usually addressed by film studies scholars. For example, Giżycki argues that in Tadeusz Peiper’s poetry objects are intentionally presented as “immobile,” which supposedly means that there are no links between his poetry and film. Cf. Marcin Giżycki, *Awangarda wobec kina: film w kręgu polskiej awangardy artystycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [The avant-garde and cinema: Cinema in the circle of the Polish artistic avant-garde of the interwar period] (Warsaw: Małe, 1996), pp. 32,35.

<sup>3</sup> *Polska myśl filmowa. Antologia tekstów z lat 1989-1939* [Polish film studies: Anthology of texts from 1989-1939], edited and selected by J. Bocheńska (Wrocław: ZNiO, 1975); *Walka o film artystyczny w międzywojennej Polsce* [The fight for artistic cinema in interwar Poland], edited by Marcin Giżycki, (Warsaw: PWN, 1989). On avant-garde poets and writers’ views on film cf.: Jadwiga Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa do roku 1939* [Polish film studies until 1939] (Wrocław: ZNiO, 1974); Marcin Giżycki, *Awangarda wobec kina* [The avant-garde and cinema]; Wojciech Otto, *Literatura i film w kulturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Literature and film in the Polish culture of the interwar period] (Poznań: PTPN, 2007); Aleksander Wójtowicz, *Wśród “nowych możliwości”. Powieść awangardowa i film* [Among ‘new opportunities’: The avant-garde novel and film] [in:] *idem, Cogito i “sejsmograf podświadomości”. Proza pierwszej awangardy* [Cogito and the “subconscious seismograph.” The prose of the first avant-garde] (Lublin: UMCS, 2010); Aleksander Wójtowicz, *Charlie w Inkipo. Nowa Sztuka i Chaplin* [Charlie in Inkipo: New Art and Chaplin] [in:] *Nowa Sztuka. Początki (i końce)* [New Art: Beginnings (and endings)] (Kraków: WUJ, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Otto, *Literatura i film* [Literature and film], pp. 21-22. This phrase was coined by Alicja Helman.

<sup>5</sup> In his introduction to *Walka o film artystyczny* [The fight for artistic cinema], Giżycki comments on the hopes associated with the new medium, combining the beliefs of Polish futurists, “Blok” constructivists and representatives of the Krakow Avant-garde. Jalu Kurek’s movie *OR* was to prove that “watching poetry” is possible. The reconstruction of this lost movie by Ignacy Szczepański and Marcin Giżycki can be viewed at: <https://artmuseum.pl/pl/filmoteka/praca/gizycki-marcin-szczepanski-ignacy-jalu-kurek-or-obliczenia> (date of access: January 11, 2021). There are explicit and implicit film inspirations in the poems of the interwar period by both Scamandrites, such as Tuwim or Wierzyński, and avant-garde poets, such as Bruno Jasiński or Kurek (M. Giżycki, *Walka o film*, pp. 17-18; W. Otto, *Literatura i film*, pp. 14-20). Many such poems have recently been collected by Darek Foks in his *Zawrót głowy. Antologia polskich wierszy filmowych* [Vertigo: Anthology of Polish film poems] (Łódź: NCKF, 2019). The influence of film on avant-garde prose was thoroughly discussed in the interwar period; it was summarized by, for example, Stefania Zahorska in *Co powieść zawdzięcza filmowi* [What does the novel owe to film] (*Kwartalnik Literacko-Naukowy* 29 [1934]). A. Wójtowicz has compiled an excellent reference list of sources on filmic aspects of avant-garde literature in *Wśród “nowych możliwości”*.

<sup>6</sup> According to Giżycki, the script was first reprinted in French under the title *Pour le film abstrait (Cercle et Carré 3* [1930]), and then in *Linia* (1, [1931]). Giżycki, *Awangarda wobec kina*, p. 18.

cinema.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to avant-garde poets, apart from Stern (the author of over thirty movie scripts), Kurek (the author of about five hundred short essays on film) Brzękowski, Bruno Jasiński, Tytus Czyżewski and, of course, Tadeusz Peiper (who commented on film in his post-war notes and in the draft of his unfinished book on “screen aesthetics”) featured prominently in *Wśród ludzi na scenach i na ekranie* [Among the people on stage and on screen]<sup>8</sup>.

Wojciech Otto's monograph *Literatura i film w kulturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Literature and film in the Polish culture of the interwar period] (Poznań 2007) focuses specifically on avant-garde “film” poetics – I shall address the same question in my article. While one can easily agree with Otto's insightful observations, considering the wide range of topics involved, his book is rather succinct, thus leaving room for further explorations. Otto's argument, namely the use of film concepts in poetry, classified in terms of the “narrative relations” in poems (including quasi-cinematic editing, intertitles, simultaneous narration, time gaps, omissions, and even a poetic play with “scene backgrounds” and “camera movements”), is well-founded and inspiring. However, more often than not, Otto does not analyze poems in detail, nor does he address a problem that many researchers of the early avant-garde consider crucial: the relationship between experimental literature and film, in regards to the crossing of artistic boundaries and the use of various tools to create a complex performative work of art. Scholars who study early Polish and Western cinema observe that many leading artists of the interwar period repeatedly argued in favor of the autonomy of their medium. This claim defined the era. “Reflections on the seventh art” (1911) by Ricciotto Canudo, a French impressionist, marks the beginning of the battle for cinema's artistic independence. It was motivated by a desire to change its status, so that it would no longer be associated with popular entertainment.<sup>9</sup> Scholars who first addressed this trend in Soviet Russia, Germany, or France (Dziga Vertov, Hans Richter or René Clair and Man Ray), most often members of the avant-garde, insisted on the specificity or even revelatory role of “the cinematic” as an autonomous feature of film. In my article, I address this broad subject in a succinct manner, examining the relationship between French and Polish avant-garde poetics of film and poetry. They both seem to be rooted in early European modernity: at that time it was believed that the cognitive apparatus of modern man, and thus his perceptual sensitivity as well, had changed significantly under the influence of new media, technological inventions, and scientific discoveries.

Christophe Wall-Romana, an American film scholar and Romanist, argues that the relations between film and poetry were very close. In his most recent book, he refers to the majority of French avant-garde poems as “cinemapoetry.” Wall-Romana observes in the introduction to his book that, in

<sup>7</sup> Giżycki, *Awangarda wobec kina*, p. 34. Active on the French avant-garde and film scene, which acknowledged the importance of the relations between literature and film, Brzękowski was perhaps best qualified to write such a book. Interestingly, this question is not addressed in the critical book *W Krakowie i w Paryżu* [In Kraków and in Paris] (PiW, Warszawa 1968); Cendrars's love for film is only briefly mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> Tadeusz Peiper, *Gdy dziesiąta muza otrzymała dźwięk i słowo* [When the tenth muse received the sound and the word], in: *Wśród ludzi na scenach i na ekranie* [Among the people on stage and on screen], vol.2. (Kraków: WL, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> R. Canudo, “Reflections on the Seventh Art,” in: *French Film Theory & Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 291-303. David Bordwell adds: “But in 1910 hardly anyone was prepared to argue that a recording technology constituted an artistic medium. There was no art to the telegraph or the telephone” (David Bordwell, *On the history of film style* [Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997], 27-28). Cinema was widely regarded as enhanced photography, a tool for reproducing reality or documentation. In Poland, many argued in favor of the unique properties of cinema as an artistic medium, starting with Karol Irzykowski and his tenth muse (1913), as well as texts by Stefania Zahorska, who was especially fond of Dadaist cinema and Soviet experiments, or Jalu Kurek, who was passionate about “pure cinema.” Cf. *Walka o film artystyczny*, 28-31.

fact, little has been written about the affinities between experimental poetry and film. He further points out that Jean Epstein's 1921 book *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui, un nouvel état d'intelligence* [Today's poetry: A new state of mind] was a crucial text for him.<sup>10</sup> Written by a queer modernist poet, director, and film scholar, the book was devoted to poetry. However, it also included an artistic manifesto, praising the analogies between literature and film. It was published in the same year as *Bonjour Cinéma*, a collection of Epstein's manifestos and essays, closely related to his work as a film director.<sup>11</sup> Wall-Romana focuses not so much on writers and scriptwriters, such as Antonin Artaud, Jean Cocteau, and Blaise Cendrars, but rather on the attitudes expressed in, for example, the opening quote by Guillaume Apollinaire, praising cinema as the principal vehicle for modern poetics. Together with Picasso, Jacob and Raynald, Apollinaire founded the Society of the Friends of Fantômas in 1913. Apollinaire's love for Louis Feuillade's popular series, produced by the famous Gaumont studio, allows us to see the cubist poet as an early surrealist, even though Breton liked Feuillade's *Vampires* more and watched it together with the famous Jacques Vaché. The discovery of Chaplin's and Griffith's films in 1916 had a colossal impact on French impressionist cinema as well as on Soviet revolutionary cinema, especially Eisenstein's and Kuleshov's films. They also influenced Apollinaire's *The New Spirit and the Poets* (1917).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Wall-Romana also argues that symbolist and synesthetic concepts of the leading advocate of pure poetry, Stéphane Mallarmé, were also rooted in film poetics. Mallarmé is thus seen in a new light. He lived near Le Pirou-Normandin cinema, which opened in 1896, and was enthusiastic about the new medium.

According to Wall-Romana, "cinepoetry" refers to the poetics of both literary texts and film

at its most general, cinepoetry (...) consists of envisioning a specific component or aspect of poetry as if it were a specific component of cinema, or vice versa, but always in writing. The screen becomes the page, a close-up turns into a metaphor, or conversely, the irregular spacing of words is meant to evoke the movement of images on screen. Poets took cinema and film culture to be reservoirs of new textual genres and practices, but they also mediated on the apparatus and the industry as potential fields of poetic expansion and actualization.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Zbigniew Gawrak wrote one of the first ever and the first Polish monographs devoted to Jean Epstein's films (*Jan Epstein. Studium natury w sztuce filmowej* [Jan Epstein: A study of nature in film] [Warsaw: Wyd. Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1962]). Gawrak commented on the Polish roots of one of the main representatives of French impressionism. Jan Stanisław Alfred Epstein was born on March 25, 1897 in Warsaw in a wealthy Jewish family. Gawrak introduces the Polish audience to a very important filmmaker; in Polish criticism in the 1920s and the 1930s, mainly due to Irzykowski's *Dziesiąta Muza* [The tenth muse], Epstein was associated with pure formalism, and wrongly so.

<sup>11</sup>I refer to both texts after: Jean Epstein, *Écrits sur le cinéma 1921-1953, volume 1, 1921-1947*, foreword by Henri Langlois, introduction by Pierre Leprohon (Paris: Édition Seghers, 1974). I have translated the quotes myself. A selection of (other) excerpts from Epstein's four theoretical books are reprinted in Gawrak's monograph.

<sup>12</sup>Christophe Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press), 3-4. Wall-Romana draws on Edgar Morin, who argued that cinema allows us to understand contemporary theatre, music and poetry (*The cinema, or the imaginary man* [1956], after Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 29).

<sup>13</sup>Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 3. Wall-Romana emphasizes that "cinepoetry," especially considering the groundbreaking importance of the cinematic experience for modernity as such, disturbs the adopted historical order of literary movements, according to which avant-garde movements opposed 19th-century symbolism in art (it applies to Polish art as well). The role played by the cinema blurs the boundary between avant-garde art and mass culture, which is said to be crucial for early modernism, traditionally understood in terms of canonical and elitist art. Thus, Wall-Romana draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "minority" poetics. In this approach, modern poetry entered the 20th century thanks to the pulp art of cinematography (Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 4). Many avant-garde artists opposed other social and cultural norms: they were rarely French natives, and many of them were Jews and representatives of non-Francophone nations. Their art could be read in terms of gender and queer studies. Wall-Romana points to Jean Epstein, a homosexual Jew and an avant-garde movie maker, as a representative of minority poetics.

There are many examples of combining poetry and film in the European and American avant-garde art: they obviously challenge theories that proclaimed the autonomy of cinema, often emphasized by both committed theoreticians of cinema and its critics.<sup>14</sup> Surrealists were fascinated by melodramas and crime stories. Rudolf de Kuenzli argues that this had to do with the “literary” aspects of film, i.e. the narrative or the plot of the movie, and not experiments with lighting, framing, or editing, as was the case with dada art.<sup>15</sup> André Breton adored Musidora (Jeanne Rocque), who played the main role in Feuillade’s *Vampires*. The Parisian star became famous, among other things, for her scandalous relationship with the writer Colette. Irma Vep, a stage artist in a tight-fitting black costume, was one of the inspirations behind the surrealist concept of a woman. Her name is an anagram of the title *Vampire*.<sup>16</sup> Revealed in the movie through time-lapse photography, the detective discovers her true identity as the leader of the Vampire gang which has been terrorizing Paris when she re-arranges the letters of the name in his mind. According to Wall-Romana, this scene may be read in terms of silent film poetry, with which both impressionists and dada filmmakers experimented later. Wall-Romana further argues that this scene and the time-lapse photography influenced “flowing” lines in poems by Apollinaire, Cendrars, and Jacob.<sup>17</sup> In turn, Man Ray, perhaps the best known representative of Dada and Surrealism in film, is credited with coining the concept “cinema-poem” (*ciné-poème*).<sup>18</sup> The inventor of “rayographs,” which he also used in his movies, considered the very structure of his most famous experimental movies to be poetic. Although, at times, he inserted written text into his movies, for example, in *Le retour à la raison* (1923), as well as in the more mature version

<sup>14</sup> The leading role in this respect was played by the media-mixing representatives of French, German and Balkan Dadaism/Surrealism, primarily sculptors and collage-artists, but also moviemakers. Pavle Levi discusses this issue in *Cinema by Other Means*. Levi writes, for example, about the “cinematic aspect” of Duchamp, whose *Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* can be interpreted in terms of a time-lapse movie and shared creative solutions found in Man Ray’s photography, films and art (a particularly interesting example of intermediality would be “silent poems” whose blurred black lines may be seen in *Le retour à la raison*). Examples of the “re-materialization” of the medium are particularly interesting, e.g. in the sculptures by Serbian surrealists Dušan Matić and Alexander Vučo (*Mad Marble* [1930]), inspired by Man Ray’s films, but also in impossible scripts, defined by Levi as “written” or “paper” films, such as *Doctor Hypnison, or the Technique of Living* (1923) by the Serbian writer Mony de Bouilly. Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26-27 and 46.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolph de Kuenzli, *Introduction*, in: *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolph de Kuenzli (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 9. Such a thesis would be confirmed by surrealist movie scripts. Surrealists often wrote movie scripts. As Agnieszka Taborska observes, surrealist scripts were similar to popular *films racontés*, i.e. press reviews. Philippe Soupault’s *Paris Nights* was to convey the cinematic experience in terms of style and composition. Soupault also created “cinematographic poems,” and one of them, *Indifférence*, about the Eiffel Tower, was made into a movie by Walter Ruttmann in 1922. A. Taborska, *Surrealism: Spiskowcy wyobraźni* [Surrealism: Conspirators of imagination] (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2013, 2013), 422 ff. Robert Desnos’s, Benjamin Péret’s and Arthur Artaud’s scripts, banned from Breton’s circle, who considered only Buñuel’s and Dalí’s films to be surreal, could not be made into a movie. Wojciech Otto also wrote about *films racontés* as a new literary genre inspired by experimental films (Otto, *Literatura i film*, 175 ff).

<sup>16</sup> Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 138-139.

<sup>17</sup> Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> The term “poetic” is often used to describe different aspects of American avant-garde films in American film studies (referring to the works of Maya Deren or Stan Brakhage). P. Adams Sitney, who writes about this concept in *Cinema of Poetry*, first discusses the “poetic” in Passolini’s movies, arguing that “the poetic” in Antonioni’s, Bertolucci’s or Godard’s movies stands in opposition to the notion of *cine-poem*, which implies a creative fusion of poetical and cinematic methods. In Passolini’s movies, “the poetic” referred to examining social and political reality, and Sitney writes in a similar way, among others, about Bergman’s and Tarkovsky’s movies (P. Adams Sitney, *Cinema of Poetry* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2015], 2-3).

of his early Dadaist work *Emak Bakia. Ciné-poème* (1926).<sup>19</sup> Man Ray's next film was closer to the very concept of film poetry as a fusion of arts that was also practiced by French Impressionists. *L'Étoile de mer* (1928) is an impressionist film. Fragments of Robert Desnos's poem, which was also the script, are inserted into the movie. Although they were incorporated into the movie as intertitles, in classic silent film fashion, the lines of the poem in no way function as "captions" that help the reader understand the plot. Rather, the poem constitutes an additional dimension of the impressionist movie, rendering interpretative traces surreal.

These and other phenomena related to the fascination of the French avant-garde poets with cinema may be read in a different light, especially if we take into account the writings of early theoreticians of cinema, especially French impressionist moviemakers, such as Canudo, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac and, above all, Epstein. They often discussed "the poetic" as a feature of artistic films. Indeed, while this concept was often used as a metaphor, it was as prominent in movie theory as the view that film is an autonomous and independent form of art. Wall-Romana, who considers Epstein a truly significant film theorist and moviemaker, even refers to him as the founder of the concept of "cinepoetry." Texts by Canudo, who in his manifesto of "the seventh art" described cinema as an art form which essentially brings together different art forms, might have also influenced French impressionist moviemakers and theoreticians. The "rhythms" of the cinema, combining image with other temporal arts, such as music and dance, were considered poetic.<sup>20</sup> Germaine Dulac, one of few female directors in the 1920s, argued: "If, at his moment, I think of interior movement, I think of literature (poetry, drama, novel) and also music."<sup>21</sup> Similarly to Epstein, she also compared photography, an essential cinematic means of expression, to the writer's pen or ink. Ultimately, however, she found film to be much different from literature and theater, concluding that cinema was similar to an abstract art form, such as music. Dulac poetically wrote about "the visualization of thoughts" in her manifesto. She also wrote about a "visual symphony" which is "made of rhythmic images, coordinated and thrown upon the screen exclusively by the perception of an artist."<sup>22</sup> Louis Delluc also referred to film as "visual poetry," ultimately drawing

<sup>19</sup>For example, Inez Hedges writes about Man Ray's films in: *Constellated Visions: Robert Desnos and Man Ray L'Étoile de mer*, in *Dada and Surrealist Film*. The script for the film that was previously considered lost is also reprinted in this book. According to Hedges, the female body is "narrated" in the film, in accordance with the aesthetic principles of surrealism. Although Hedges focuses on the links between Ray's photographs and his previous films, she also examines the hidden meaning of the film, which is similar to Breton's *Nadja* – also a poet and a woman, *soror mystica*, who helps man achieve alchemical unity (Hedges, *Constellated Visions*, 102). In the introduction to his book, de Kuenzli focuses on Dadaist experiments as an extension of attempts aimed at overcoming the immobility of a visual – still respecting the abstract concept of visual arts, also related to kinetic constructivist sculptures, and possibly also avant-garde music. De Kuenzli draws attention to the anti-narrative logic and the metaphorical and metonymic potential of Picabia and Clair's *Entre'act*. He also describes Hans Richter's movies as "cinematic poetry" (de Kuenzli, *Introduction*, 4-6).

<sup>20</sup>Canudo initially wrote about the "birth of the sixth art" (*La naissance d'un sixième art*, 1911), claiming that film was "a plastic art in motion" (Bordwell, *On the history of film style*, 62), and only then about "the seventh art" ("Reflections on the Seventh Art," 1911, first edition: 1923; *French Film Theory & Criticism*, pp. 291-303). He added dance to the spatial arts (such as architecture, painting and sculpture) and the temporal arts (such as music and poetry), claiming the cinema was their perfect synthesis: "The seventh art combines all the arts. These are moving pictures, i.e. Plastic Art that develops according to the principles of Rhythmic Art. (...) The forms and rhythms that we call life appear thanks to the rotation of the camera" (Canudo, "Reflections on the Seventh Art," in *French Film Theory & Criticism*, 293). See also Iwona Kolasieńska-Pasterczyk, *Francuska szkoła impresjonistyczna* [French Impressionist School], in *Kino nieme* [Silent film], ed. Tadeusz Lubelski, Iwona Sowińska, Rafał Syska (Krakow: Univesitas, 2012), 690.

<sup>21</sup>Germaine Dulac, "The essence of the cinema: The visual idea" (first edition: "Les Cahiers du mois" no. 16-17 (1925)), *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, Karen J. Shepherdson (London: Taylor & Francis 2004), 59.

<sup>22</sup>Dulac, "The essence of the cinema", 61.

on painting.<sup>23</sup> Jean Epstein, discussed thoroughly in *Cinepoetry*, wrote about the “poetical aspects” of film explicitly and extensively. In *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in the fragment that functions as Epstein’s manifesto, we read: “Cinema permeates new literature. This mysterious art also borrows a lot from literature.”<sup>24</sup> Epstein believed that both means of artistic expression stood in opposition to theater, considered to be the traditional carrier of the bourgeois narrative. Drawing on Canudo, he also argued that both film and literature are autonomous art forms.<sup>25</sup> The director of *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928), an unusual, rhythmic, and highly metaphorical movie based on Edgar Allan Poe’s short story, claimed that there was a connection between the tendency to fictionalize and simplify the plot – which Dulac associated with undesirable literariness – and the existing means of presenting stories, be it on stage or in prose. Epstein argued that there were movies which opposed this tradition, and that their narrative structures were based on dreams or memories, including Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, which the post-structuralist theorist of cinema Gilles Deleuze also considered a cinematic novel.

Epstein claimed that cinema embodied the experience of modernity: an era of mass labor, mechanical (re)production, popular culture, and the Freudian “management of collective psychosexual fatigue,” which manifested itself as excess and anxiety, and not, as was also believed, dullness.<sup>26</sup> We should also remember about the fascination with movement and time, on which Epstein successfully commented, drawing, albeit somewhat generally, on Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*.<sup>27</sup> Gilles Deleuze, who also drew on Bergson in his book on cinema, argued that cinema gave rise to the popular modern understanding of time.<sup>28</sup> Cinema was the youngest invention of modern times: “What counts is that the mobile camera is like a general equivalent of all the means of locomotion (...) – aeroplane, car, boat – (...) and many means of communication-expression (printing, photography and cinema).”<sup>29</sup> At the same time, according to the philosopher, it remained a system which reproduced “any-instant-whatever that is” “as a function of equidistant instants, selected so as to create an impression of continuity.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, we can think about the emergence of the significant, the unique, at any time.<sup>31</sup> According to Deleuze, a “mobile section,” the cinematic “im-

<sup>23</sup>Delluc wrote about film as an “animated image” and “visual poetry,” seeing it primarily as the art of moving, stylized detail. Eugene C. McCreary, “Louis Delluc. Film Theorist, Critic, and Prophet”, *Cinema Journal* 16,1 (Autumn 1976), 20-21.

<sup>24</sup>Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence* (1921), in *Écrits*, 65.

<sup>25</sup>Epstein, *De quelques conditions de la photographie* (1923), in *Écrits*, 137.

<sup>26</sup>Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 119 .

<sup>27</sup>In 1903, Bergson delivered a lecture entitled *The Creative Mind*, which was later developed in the book *La Pensée et le mouvant* (1934). Translated into many languages, the book influenced Cubists and contributed to the creation and popularization of the term “Bergsonism.” In *Creative Evolution* (1907), Bergson compared the human mind to a cinematograph, which, in the philosopher’s view, was a negative thing, pointing to a tendency to perceive the world in a symbolic way, in a series of still memorized images. Deleuze in *Cinema* engages in a dialogue with this concept, borrowing the crucial concept of “the movement-image” from Bergson and maintaining that the latter did not appreciate the sensational possibilities of cinema, although he created concepts that perfectly capture their essence. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The movement-image, Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 10-11 and 17.

<sup>28</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 10–11. Wall-Romana calls Epstein’s concept “techno-romantic;” it blurs the boundary between the intellectual and the material. Because of his holistic approach, Abel Gance referred to Epstein as “a young Spinoza” and Epstein employed the concept of “a unique intellectual plane,” uniting bodies, minds and objects with a “clear Spinozist intent” (Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 122). Wall-Romana argues that the Deleuzian concept of the “plane of immanence” is rooted in *Poésie d’aujourd’hui*; Deleuze also refers directly to Epstein’s writings in *Cinema*.

<sup>29</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 12-13.

<sup>30</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 13.

<sup>31</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 15.



age-movement,” is connected with the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* (1896): the discovery of “an image that is movement beyond the conditions of natural perception.”<sup>32</sup> The ancient concept of time, Deleuze argues, is focused on eternity, the whole, in which movement refers to “forms” or “ideas” which are immovable, and it itself expresses their dialectics. Modern science, in turn, looks at time in Bergsonian terms as an “independent variable;” movement is no longer recreated in physics, geometry, and astronomy on the basis of transcendental formal elements but rather using “immanent material elements,” i.e. mobile sections.<sup>33</sup>

Because of film, mimesis should no longer be associated with a still image of an eternal, unified moment. Deleuze seems to repeat what Epstein, Delluc, and Canudo said earlier about movement in film, although the Impressionists associated many other qualities with film, rendering it a meta-physical or even a mystical process. The possibility of capturing the “fourth dimension of reality,” i.e. movement or growth in space-time, was electrifying for them. “*Photogénie*” was associated with this phenomenon.<sup>34</sup> Epstein argued that all phenomena whose “moral dimension” (and only movable aspects of reality had a moral dimension: “both things and consciousness”) can be enhanced thanks to film are photogenic.<sup>35</sup> Spinoza’s pantheism, also present in Bergson’s philosophical concepts, becomes cinematic in nature, which gives Epstein’s, Clair’s, and Delluc’s films, as well as impressionistic concepts themselves, a sublime character, characteristic of the early avant-garde, which competed with scientific inventions. Epstein argues that one should not look for traditional “movement” in film, because movement in a movie is the result of us perceiving all spiritual dimensions – not three, as was previously thought, but four: “[the fourth dimension] obviously exists: it is time. Spirit moves in time as it moves in space. (...) Photogenic mobility is mobility in space-time. We can say that the photogenic aspect of a given object is the result of its space-time variations.”<sup>36</sup> The belief in the unique possibilities of the film camera was widespread among the enthusiasts of the new medium. Similarly to Epstein, Germaine Dulac observes: “[a]mong others, there is a slow-motion study of the blooming of flowers, whose stages of life appear to us brutal and defined, birth, blooming, death, (...) and whose movements equivalent to suffering and joy (...) appear before us in cinema in the fullness of their existence.”<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, likewise in French and Polish avant-garde poetry, especially in artistic manifestos, we find not only a fascination with change and movement typical of twentieth-century aesthetics, which indicate a Bergsonian relationship between poetry and cinema, but also a “paper” approach to the movable, i.e. a paper representation of space-time. I shall comment on the views of Polish avant-garde poets, who encouraged the reader to read their poems in connection with cinematic, essentially photogenic, conventions. A “stop-motion” reading – with its focus on quasi-editorial “cuts,” settings, and “close-ups” as essential elements of the poem,

<sup>32</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 10-11.

<sup>33</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 12.

<sup>34</sup>Malcom Turvey wrote an entire book on revelatory early concepts of cinema, focusing on Epstein, Vertov, Balázs, and Kracauer (Malcolm Turvey, *Doubting Vision. Film and the Revelationist Tradition* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2008]. Epstein was convinced that film was actually a new human cognitive apparatus, in a scientific sense, similar to the microscope. It allows one to see the dimensions of reality that are invisible to the naked eye. The very concept of *photogénie* was coined by Louis Delluc (*Photogénie*, Paris 1920) in an attempt to ensure the autonomy of the cinema. Delluc tries to justify its unique nature, but the text remains vague. Delluc writes, for example, that *photogénie* should not be associated with beautiful sets or actors. Louis Delluc, *Photogénie (Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, 49-51).

<sup>35</sup>Epstein, *De quelque conditions de la photogénie*, in *Écrits*, 138

<sup>36</sup>Epstein, *De quelque conditions de la photogénie*, in *Écrits*, 139.

<sup>37</sup>Dulac, “The essence of the cinema,” 60.

which “unravels” before the reader’s eyes – makes us think about pure or autonomous poetry which stands in opposition to nineteenth-century Kantian aesthetics’ view of a work of art as static and immobile, enjoyed during a private, silent session.

The features that were to determine the character of new film and new literature, whose basic form, according to Epstein, were outlined by Rimbaud in *Illuminations* and Cendrars in *Nineteen Elastic Poems*, are defined by a new “aesthetics of proximity.”<sup>38</sup> For Wall-Romana, the popularity of the Griffithian close-up in literature and film is associated with the tired masses, something that Epstein also comments on, and the fact that it is an important experience of modernity. According to Epstein, fatigue is “a new state of mind.”<sup>39</sup> The exhaustion of the modern city dweller, often associated with socialism and the fight for the rights of the working class, was discussed in the press in connection with silent movies. Chaplin and Griffith, American masters of the silent movie, commented on class differences in their works. A similar remark, in a similar context, may also be found, for example, in *Metafora Teraźniejszości* [The Metaphor of the Present], one of Tadeusz Peiper’s most popular manifestos. It was published in 1922, i.e. around the same time as Epstein’s text: “Contemporary poetry is full of metaphors. Never before have metaphors been as favored as they are today. Some argue that this interesting literary phenomenon has to do with the fact that people today are exhausted and fatigued; new, unexpected verbal connections are meant to tease and invigorate them.”<sup>40</sup> Looking with a tired eye is for Epstein both close and non-interpretive: it is vague and blurry, like a slow-motion impressionist film. The poetry of proximity is the poetry of everyday life, which also means that all “holistic” forms of cognition, for example, dadaism as abstract art, must be abandoned.<sup>41</sup> In Man Ray’s experimental works, we look at the material so closely that it acquires materiality in the actual touch of the object-artist, whose reflection is captured on film. Rationalizing explanations or symbolist puzzles disappear and a “rayogram” appears.<sup>42</sup> When we are watching a movie, the eye develops and adds to the perception of scenes-as-events and at the same time penetrates the supposedly unmediated material, which here is real. Similarly to Man Ray’s works or Fernand Léger’s *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), Epstein’s man, both in cinematic and literary reality, as in life, comes face to face with the material. However, Epstein’s popular movies have been artistically transposed. The French poet-director calls close-ups “the theater of the skin:” “[s]uch penetration creates intimacy. The face flashes under the magnifying glass, it shows its fiery geography. (...) It is the miracle of real presence, life manifests itself, open like a beautiful pomegranate, peeled from its shell, assimilable, barbaric.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup>J. Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in *Écrits*, 66.

<sup>39</sup>Gawrak, *Jan Epstein*, 81. According to Epstein, both excitement and constant tension are to blame for how tired the masses are, which he describes as a new state of mental health. In *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui*, he writes: “Do you think that the train driver (...) who faces catastrophe at almost every station does not arrive at his destination intellectually tired? At this point, if he were a poet, he would be writing poems. Poets simply said first what we could not see” (Gawrak, *Jan Epstein*, 82).

<sup>40</sup>Peiper’s understanding of fatigue is different from Epstein’s. In Freudian terms, fatigue leads to hyper-excitement, sexual frustration, or anxiety which manifests itself in restlessness and excess. Psychologists such as Théodor Ribot and Albert Deschamps wrote about fatigue as anaesthesia. Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 119; Tadeusz Peiper, “Metafora teraźniejszości” [The metaphor of the present], *Zwrotnica* (November 1922), in *Tędy. Nowe usta* [This way: New mouth] (Krakow: WL, 1972), 54.

<sup>41</sup>The Dadaistic negation of meaning, the impossibility of grasping it completely, may be seen in the representations of “the irreducible materiality of a self-referential object.” Such was the nature of Duchamp’s ready-mades. Duchamp commented on their “visual indifference.” Levi, *Cinema*, 3.

<sup>42</sup>Levi, *Cinema*, 7.

<sup>43</sup>Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in *Écrits*, 66. Epstein’s manifesto at this point is divided into lines. The final positions are marked with commas, which suggests an attempt to write an artistic program in verse. Such a strategy was also employed by Polish avant-garde artists, such as Peiper or Brzękowski.



The “aesthetics of succession,” another key cinematic and poetic feature, also invites comparisons with life, this time in its “swarming” mobility: “[a] ton of details makes up a poem, and cinematic editing, drop by drop, creates a spectacle. It is then enough to centrifuge this process and we will obtain the final impression from what is left. Cinema and literature are motion. A sudden but also angular<sup>44</sup> succession leads to the circular perfection of impossible simultaneism.”<sup>45</sup> Epstein further mentions: the aesthetics of mental quickness, the aesthetics of sensuality, the aesthetics of metaphors, and the aesthetics of the ephemeral. Epstein talks about both visual and literary metaphors and refers to Abel Gance and Apollinaire. According to Epstein, a poem is a “cavalcade of metaphors in a short circuit,”<sup>46</sup> and the main difference between literary and visual metaphors is that on the screen the metaphorical principle “imposes itself directly.” For example, when Apollinaire compares a cheering crowd who is waving white handkerchiefs to white birds or leaves falling or spinning in the wind, in both cases, these metaphors are not to be read symbolically. “[S]uch birds are not pigeons or ravens, but simply birds.” For Epstein, they rise and fall – they move – “[w]ithin five years, cinematographic poems will be created: 150 meters and 100 images, like beads in the rosary of a complex plot.”<sup>47</sup>

Let me compare this poetic and cinematic manifesto with Peiper’s *Ku specyficzności kina* [Towards the uniqueness of cinema]. It was published in *Zwrotnica* in 1923 as part of a series in which the poet commented on cinema. Peiper lists the most interesting cinematic narratives, including, similarly to Epstein in *Bonjour Cinéma*, the films of D.W. Griffith, i.e. movies, which, André Bazin associates with the beginnings of realism in cinema, the premises of which he considers to be crucial for the entire development of the new art.<sup>48</sup> However, at the turn of the 1910s and the 1920s, many critics and artists referred to Griffith, whose movies were immensely popular; some claimed that the director created mass spectacles and not experimental movies, even though he employed “intellectual editing” characteristic of Soviet cinema (especially Sergei Eisenstein’s movies). Peiper shows his interest in this director in his unique avant-garde way by concentrating on the face of Lillian Gish, Griffith’s leading heroine, in *Way Down East* (1920). According to Peiper, the close-up of a face is one of the elements of new cinematic language. Interestingly, Peiper writes about Gish’s face in detail: “sometimes, different parts of her face express different things: the eyes express one thing and the mouth expresses something else; and sometimes the eyes express one thing, and the eyebrows express something else. When the ‘husband’ reveals to her that she is not his wife, she does not believe him at first, and then she pretends that she does not believe him and that it is all a joke. She shows it brilliantly: her mouth is laughing, and her eyes are crying. And then one eye shows one thing, and the other eye, shows something else; one eye expresses pain, while the other eye expresses amazement.”<sup>49</sup> It is not surprising that Peiper focuses so much on the moving landscape of Gish’s face. After all, in his poetic manifesto, he argued that we get to know a given object “*primo*, as a whole. *Secundo*, as a sequence of wholes that are ever more

<sup>44</sup>Epstein’s text is quite poetic; the word “angulaire” is probably an allusion to “angular velocity,” a vector measure of rotation rate, which refers to how fast an object, e.g. the earth, rotates. It may also refer to the angles of a film frame.

<sup>45</sup>Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in *Écrits*, 67.

<sup>46</sup>Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in *Écrits*, 68.

<sup>47</sup>Epstein, *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui, un nouvel état d’intelligence*, in *Écrits*. It seems that the author refers to ravens and pigeons because of their symbolic meanings; otherwise, favoring the genus over the species would be a manifestation of symbolic universalization.

<sup>48</sup>Bordwell, *On the history of film style*, 75.

<sup>49</sup>Peiper, “Ku specyficzności kina” [Towards the uniqueness of cinema] (*Zwrotnica* February 1923), in *Tędy*, 225–226.

detailed.”<sup>50</sup> Epstein writes about the close-up as the essential artistic means of expression of film in a very similar way:

I can never express how I love wide American shots. Suddenly, a face appears on the screen, and the drama is right in front of me, talking directly to me (...) Here, the tragedy is anatomical (...). It can last for a short time, because *photogénie* lasts for a quarter of a second (...) A face that is about to smile is more beautiful than the actual smile (...). I love lips that want to speak but are still silent.<sup>51</sup>

Epstein presented the perceptual apparatus of the modern man in the “fourth dimension:” vision is fragmented like a film that needs to be edited; it is focused on detail; it breaks down still and static objects in Bergson’s space-time duration, in which the boundary between representation and decoration or the emotion which affects the observer’s tired eye becomes blurred: “Animism is the key feature of cinema,” Epstein writes:

(...) Decorations are fragmented and each element is expressive on its own. (...) A plant on the prairie is a female smiling spirit. Full of rhythm and personality, anemones transform majestically, in a manner similar to all pants. The hand is separated from the human being; it takes on a life of its own; it suffers by itself and delights by itself. The finger is separated from the hand. Life suddenly focuses on and finds its most powerful expression in the nail, which mechanically tortures the stylograph that is charged with storm.<sup>52</sup>

Pointing to autonomous and unique cinematic features in *Ku specyficzności kina* [Towards the uniqueness of cinema], Peiper also drew attention to the importance of a whole and the artistic use of intertitles. In a typically impressionistic fashion, he argued that beautiful stereoscopic or painterly backgrounds should be avoided: *photogénie* would not be achieved otherwise.<sup>53</sup> The background was to constitute a compositional whole with the actors and enhance the impressions conveyed by the objects which move on the screen. Peiper writes about masses, about crowds, as *the* actor of the new cinema, as seen, for example, in Griffith’s *Intolerance* or *Orphans of the Storm*. Drawing on the French category of *photogénie*, Peiper argues: “[Griffith] arranges [background] into long perspectives. Thus, he can show the crowd far away as a tiny blur that moves steadily to the foreground, growing bigger and bigger, taking on a form, taking on new shapes, becoming more and more distinct, and finally, in the foreground, breaking into exaggerated and distinct individuals.”<sup>54</sup> Peiper associates playing with shots and the role of background with movement in general. The director is a visual composer: they incorporate time and (ever-changing) space into their works of art.

In both *Ku specyficzności kina* and *Autonomia ekranu* [The autonomy of the screen] (1923), Peiper discusses one of the most fundamental avant-garde assumptions, trying to convince the reader that the new medium is unique and autonomous. Peiper comments on the metaphor in his poetical manifestos as well, emphasizing that modern poetry should “work” like an electric spark, insofar as it should trigger instantaneous associations. When Peiper writes “contemporary poetry trembles

<sup>50</sup>Peiper, *Komizm, dowcip, metafora* [Comedy, wit, metaphor] (first published in *Tędy* [1930]), in *Tędy*, 304.

<sup>51</sup>Epstein, *Bonjour Cinéma*; quote after: Gawrak, *Jan Epstein*, 85-86.

<sup>52</sup>Epstein, *Le cinématographe vue de l'Etna* (1926), in *Écrits*, 134.

<sup>53</sup>Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa* [Polish film studies], 82-83.

<sup>54</sup>Peiper, *Ku specyficzności kina*, in *Tędy*, 224.

with a blizzard of metaphors,”<sup>55</sup> he expresses his fascination with movement, which he shares with filmmakers and film lovers. Indeed, Peiper’s “arrangement of beautiful sentences” strongly corresponds to Epstein’s “cavalcade of interconnected metaphors.” We have already seen that the processes of blooming and filming correspond to one another. Following in the footsteps of the author of *Cinema in Other Means*, perhaps we should look at this comparison/juxtaposition as a paper form of *photogénie*, in which “the poem would develop like a living organism; like a bud blooming in front of us.”<sup>56</sup> The cinematic features of poems such as *Kwiat ulicy* [Street flower] or *Chwila ze złota* [Golden moment] were described in a similar manner.<sup>57</sup> When we read them in accordance with Epstein’s theory, we notice that blooming captured in time-lapse photography – as a series of separate yet overlapping and ordered images in a specific “intellectual sequence” which develops in the spacetime of the reader’s eye – also captures the Bergsonian, moving, aspect of a poem. Peiper’s “moment” would develop in terms of zooming in or out, in keeping with the principles of French impressionist cinema. *Zemsta* [Revenge], and especially the poem *Na plaży* [On the beach], are great examples of how film “works” in poetry. When extremely detailed and “materialistic” images are repeated, we do not read them as a narrative. When we look at a female swimmer and a male swimmer in more and more detailed shots, repeatedly diving into and out of the sea, and then making love in the forest, we are forced to correct, and at the same time deepen, our perception. Images multiply, as the intimate encounter progresses. Still newer interpretations present themselves when we read this text in the context of Cubism. Such a reading is discussed in the 1924 article *Kamedułom sztuki* [The Camaldolese of art]: “I am inclined to think that Picasso’s so-called ‘*perspective circonspicte*’ was inspired by cinematographic perspective.”<sup>58</sup> The bodies of the male swimmer and the female swimmer, the cityscapes of Gdynia and Gdańsk, connected by the beach, swimsuits, sea, forest, fluids and emotions are “fragmented” in the poem, and then (re)arranged on a single poetic plane; waves of lines lead to the final, climactic, line that can be re-played – recreated in (re)reading like a movie. The poetic director re-plays *Na plaży* repeatedly, as if it were a movie composed of obsessive memories, as if he tried to show the viewer, in slow motion and in detail, just how vast the spacetime is. Deleuze argues that such repetition is justified in Bergsonian “technical” and philosophical terms: “Thus in a sense movement has two aspects. On the one hand, that which happens between objects or parts; on the other hand, that which expresses the duration or the whole. The result is that duration, by changing qualitatively, is divided up into objects within a closed system to open duration, and duration to the objects of the system which it forces to open up. Movement relates the objects between which it is established to a changing whole which it expresses, and vice versa.”<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, the “cinematic nature” of Peiper’s artistic philosophy stands in opposition to assumptions about the strict autonomy of art as *the* fundamental feature of Krakow avant-garde poetry, understood in terms of “language in language,” which even affective approaches could not disprove. Such an assumption is deeply rooted in Polish literary studies. Thus, we must rethink the very question of artistic autonomy in Polish literary studies. When Peiper writes in *Kamedułom sztuki* that “contemporary art cannot be fully explained, justified or created without taking into consideration

<sup>55</sup>Peiper, *Metafora terażniejszości*, in *Tędy*, 54

<sup>56</sup>Peiper, *Poezja jako budowa* [Poetry as construction] (first published in *Nowe usta* [1925]), in *Tędy*, 349.

<sup>57</sup>Kucharczyk, *Pierwiastki filmowe* [Cinematic features], 46; Otto, *Literatura i film*, p. 35. Kucharczyk makes cubist comparisons, referring to Janusz Sławiński.

<sup>58</sup>T. Peiper, “Kamedułom sztuki” [The Camaldolese of art], *Gazeta Lwowska* (June 1924), in *Tędy*, 113.

<sup>59</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 11.

non-artistic factors” or that “wanting to justify all our aspirations only with artistic needs is like struggling in a bottle that is firmly closed,”<sup>60</sup> he is referring to the cinematograph, which is, in keeping with Canudo’s theory, a “synthesis” of arts but also a truly revelatory machine, allowing us to see what was previously not visible to the naked eye. Peiper does not refer directly to Epstein. Indeed, we can trace all references to cinematic movement and time as the hidden “fourth dimension” of representation back to Bergson – his philosophy, especially the book *Creative Evolution*, was immensely popular at the time. Stefan Kordian Gacki’s artistic philosophy of *Nowa Sztuka* [New art], analyzed by Aleksander Wójtowicz in his book *Nowa Sztuka. Początki (i końce)* [New art: The beginnings (and the ends)], reads like a *collage* of French aesthetic theories, including film theories. In *Na drodze do nowego klasycyzmu* [Towards new classicism], Gacki draws on Surrealism and argues that dreams and automatic reflexes should be employed in poetry, thus arguing for a radical change in poetic technique and emphasizing the role of cinematic techniques. They were to endow poetry with instantaneous associations, shortcuts, and lyrical and pictorial explosiveness, which Gacki associated with broadly understood “Bergsonism.” According to Gacki (and Epstein claimed the same), such an artistic approach was best exemplified by the works of Blaise Cendrars.<sup>61</sup> Avant-garde filmmakers and avant-garde poets were equally fascinated by cinematic movement and speed as new means of artistic expression. In *Dziesiąta muza* [The tenth muse], the leading Polish theoretician of that time, Karol Irzykowski, refers to cinema as the “lyric of movement.” He writes about its “aesthetic qualities,” arguing that they may be “contemplated” artistically: “(...) hunters are walking in the snow, a traveler is drinking from a waterfall, people are swimming in boats as waves touch the oars, and two people are fighting. Every episode is distinctly beautiful, just like Żeromski’s metaphors and landscapes.”<sup>62</sup> The theories of the French Impressionists were also quite popular in Poland, as evidenced by various, often indirect, allusions in Polish sources. While French manifestos were never translated into Polish, Polish film theoreticians seem to show a familiarity with them.<sup>63</sup>

The theories of Germain Dulac, Louis Delluc, and Epstein, for example, were discussed in Polish literary journals as early as in 1922. The concept of *photogénie* was first studied and propagated in Poland by Leon Trystan, a filmmaker, director, and film journalist. Irzykowski engaged in a theoretical dispute with Trystan. While Trystan does not refer directly to Dulac, he also writes about “cinema

<sup>60</sup>Peiper, *Kamedułom sztuki*, in *Tędy*, 110 and 114.

<sup>61</sup>Stefan Kordian Gacki, “Na drodze do nowego klasycyzmu” [Towards new classicism], *Nowa Sztuka* 1 (1925): 6.

<sup>62</sup>K. Irzykowski, “Śmierć kinematografu” [The death of the cinematograph] (article from 1913, published in *Świat; Polska myśl filmowa*, 74-75). It was included in the longer text *Królestwo ruchu* [Kingdom of movement] at the beginning of *Dziesiąta muza* [The tenth Muse] (K. Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza. Zagadnienia estetyczne kina* [Tenth Muse: Cinematic aesthetics] [Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924] 13-14). Irzykowski writes there about the “aesthetic qualities of movement” and refers to the scenes which show movement as “contemplative.” Thus, he tries to save the cinematograph, responding to Bergson’s criticism, who considered film a medium composed of static pictures. Cinema is as fast as thinking, even if it remains schematic: “(...) because it is schematic, film is able to adapt to the leaps of imagination,” “it is the equivalent of thought, as changeable and mobile as music and poetry” (*Polska myśl filmowa*, p. 75).

<sup>63</sup>M. Giżycki, *Walka o film awangardowy*, p. 26. Kamila Kuc in *Visions of Avant-Garde Film* states that the Polish audience in the interwar period had access to many ambitious French productions (films by Abel Gance, Germaine Dulac or Jean Renoir) associated with the aesthetics of film impressionism (Kuc, *Visions of Avant-Garde Film*, 113-114). As Bocheńska points out, one chapter from Epstein’s book *La Poésie d’aujourd’hui* was published in Polish in September 1921 in *Kurier Polski*, and it was later reviewed in *Nowa Sztuka*. Władysław Tatarkiewicz commented on Epstein’s views in the series of articles *La Phénomène littéraire* in *Przegląd Warszawski* in the essay “Z estetyki francuskiej” [From French aesthetics] (vol. 1, no. 5 [1922]); *Kinema* published Canudo’s article “Piękno w sztuce filmowej” [Beauty in cinema] (no. 10 [1921]) and an article on Delluc (no. 39 [1924]). *Kino dla wszystkich* published an interview with Epstein (no. 12 [1926]). Leon Trystan reviewed Epstein’s and Delluc’s texts in *Film Polski*. Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, pp. 79-80.

as visual music.”<sup>64</sup> Marcin Giżycki points out that Jalu Kurek also based his cinematic concepts on the writings of French impressionists, “whose texts he read in newspapers and journals”: “From Delluc, he undoubtedly borrowed the concept of ‘objects and people in proportion.’ Epstein taught him to believe in the interpretative properties of the tool: the camera, the lenses.”<sup>65</sup> Kurek explained his notion of the experimental image – OR – in a manner similar to Epstein’s concept of the “fourth dimension,” namely as the representation of “the accidental visual convergence of images and the expressive qualities of directional tensions,”<sup>66</sup> though he also argued that movement should be recorded at a specific (pre-calculated) speed. Meanwhile, for French cinema aesthetes like Kurek, poetry was a key point of comparison, allowing him to demonstrate the “photogenic” potential of cinema. In one of his most important theoretical essays *Kino – zwycięstwo naszych oczu* [Cinema: The victory of our eyes], Kurek argued that cinema embodies the mechanical rhythm of life and movement. He further observed: “The lens is everywhere and sees everything. We demand that it gives us an instantaneous and concrete image. Only ‘photogenic poetry’ can give us a contraction that is pure, unspeakable, and unwritten poetry.” He then added: “Film is optical poetry” that could give crowds “15 minutes of pure poetry.”<sup>67</sup> Cinema is in a much closer synthetic relationship with poetry for Jan Brzękowski, who wrote an experimental and very poetic film script for *Kobieta i koła* [The Woman and circles], making, among other things, visual analogies between the geometric shapes of various objects. In his essay *Film a nowa poezja* [Film and new poetry], Brzękowski draws a direct connection between cinema and poetry, pointing to the relationship between the “external forms” of cinema and its experimental means of expression. Drawing on French film theorists, especially Epstein, Brzękowski argues that, apart from speed and rhythm, the image conveys “the simultaneity of many realities,” “blurs the boundaries between thought and its realization” and “divides the impression into individual elements” in order to “achieve a stronger impact of the whole.”<sup>68</sup> This leads to a unique time-lapse analysis of film movement in a text that is both theoretical and literary:

Let’s take a car which is in a car chase. How will the poet express this? He will emphasize a certain lack of logical continuity of impressions, their instantaneous mutual succession, simultaneity, and

<sup>64</sup>Leon Trystan, “Kino jako muzyka wzrokowa” [Cinem as visual music], *Film Polski* no. 2-3 (1925), in *Polska myśl filmowa*, 112-115. Trystan based his discussion of the impressionist concept of *photogénie* on Louis Delluc and, above all, on Epstein, and, as Bocheńska argues, his argument was clear and logical (Leon Trystan, “Fantazja widza w kinie” [The phantasy of the viewer at the movies], *Kinema* no. 15-16 [1922]; “Jean Epstein »Cinéma«”, *Film Polski* no. 2-3 [1923]; after Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, 83. Cf. also L. Trystan, “Fotogeniczność (próba analizy psychologicznej)” [*Photogénie*: An attempt at psychological analysis]), in *Polska myśl filmowa*, 109ff.). Karol Irzykowski argued that the concept of *photogénie* had not been clearly defined even by French theorists (Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, 82). In many Polish essays on film, *photogénie* takes on various meanings and roles and writers often do not refer to original sources. It is presented as an abstract, vague term that is related to the cinematic, which could indicate that the term was misunderstood and used as a metaphor.

<sup>65</sup>Giżycki, *Awangarda wobec kina*, 102. Giżycki discusses Kurek’s concepts in strictly cinematic terms in the wider context of the film he reconstructed, *OR (Obliczenia rytmiczne)* [Rhythmic Calculations], one of few Polish avant-garde films (*ibid.*, 125-127). I do not refer to theories which are closely related to film productions; instead, I refer to avant-garde poetical theories and manifestos. Therefore, I do not discuss the ‘Themersons’ famous productions, which are, after all, deeply rooted in Polish literary tradition.

<sup>66</sup>In Kurek’s film, film itself was to be expressive. For example, the human face was not shown so that the viewer could focus on converging shapes, direction, pace, and semantic metaphors in editing. Kurek, “Objaśniam OR” [I explain OR] *Linia* no. 5 (1933), in *Walka o film artystyczny*, 237-238.

<sup>67</sup>Jalu Kurek, “Kino – zwycięstwo naszych oczu” [Cinema: The victory of our eyes], *Głos Narodu* (March 22, 1926), in *Walka o film artystyczny*, 134-135. Bocheńska argues that Kurek’s views on cinema are similar to his poetic concepts, typical of the Krakow avant-garde and its constructivist program. She also points out that Kurek drew on Epstein’s theories. Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, 166-167.

<sup>68</sup>J. Brzękowski, “Film a nowa poezja” [Film and new poetry], *Wiadomości Literackie* no. 28 (1933), in *Polska myśl filmowa*, 208.

the role of secondary details. The film director will do the same by showing scenes from the realm of facts and actual impressions. He will show the arrow on the tachometer, the chauffeur's hand on the steering wheel, the tachometer again, the blurred landscape, the chauffeur's face, the tachometer again, etc. These (seemingly) unrelated images are more expressive than an organized and well-structured story. (...) It would be extremely interesting to show the relationship between the poetic metaphor and the film metaphor, to point to emotional situations in poetry and film, to the meaning of 'foreground' and 'close-ups' in film and poetry. In many cases, new poetry has inspired film to look for its unique means of expression. Film has had a similar effect on poetry.<sup>69</sup>

Epstein, similarly to Bergson, argues that reality is constantly changing. It is constantly becoming. It is never static. Both French and Polish avant-garde artists recognized the revolutionary aspects of cinema – movement was recorded on film – and it must have influenced the old ways of representing the world, defined as a space of shared experiences. Indeed, avant-garde artists often perceived it as an intermedial artistic reality. Boško Tokin (Filmus), who, together with Micić, was one of the cosigners of the Serbian *Manifesto of Zenithism* (1921), greatly influenced by French Surrealism, wrote: "The cinematograph is capable of uniting the elements of all other arts, it presents the STYLE of its epoch. As Canudo put it (...) the cinematograph has already given the world a new artist: the painter-sculptor-architect of light-musician-poet-choreographer of black and white, it has given it the *metteur en scene*."<sup>70</sup> Anatol Stern also saw in artistic cinema, especially in French cinema, an art that "organizes, constructs ordinary reality by means of the camera as if with the chisel."<sup>71</sup> In *Cinema*, Gilles Deleuze refers to Epstein, who writes about cubist and simultaneist, futuristic, painting. Instead of submitting to the perspective of "the whole" of history, the painter enters it, splits it, recreating the movement of the artistic process, i.e. the changes which take place in time, coded in a form that is unfinished, in a tunnel vision fashion: "[f]or the perspective of the outside he thus substitutes the perspective of the inside, a multiple perspective, shimmering, sinuous, variable and contractile, like the hair of a hygrometer."<sup>72</sup> Drawing on Epstein, Deleuze further observes: "[t]he cinema, even more directly than painting, conveys a relief in time, a perspective in time: it expresses time itself as perspective or relief."<sup>73</sup> Film as a "mobile section" and a "relief in time" was essential for abstract painting. It also inspired kinetic art and experimental avant-garde poetry, including (as Witold Sadowski argues) its layout. Indeed, film as a "mobile section" and a "relief in time" is able to visualize the complexities of the autonomous artistic process, and thus may also open up new interpretative and critical opportunities for "art on paper."

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>69</sup>Brzękowski, "Film a nowa poezja", in *Polska myśl filmowa*, 208-209. Bocheńska argues that also in *Poezja integralna* [Integral poetry] (1923) Brzękowski writes about the associative potential of poetry and also addresses the affinities between poetry and cinema. Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, 164.

<sup>70</sup>*Manifesto of Zenithism* (1921). After Levi, *Cinema*, 13.

<sup>71</sup>Anatol Stern, "»Faust« i »Carmen« na ekranie" [*Faust* and *Carmen* on screen], *Wiadomości Literackie* no. 7 (1927): 4; quote after: Bocheńska, *Polska myśl filmowa*, 87.

<sup>72</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 23.

<sup>73</sup>Deleuze, *Cinema*, 23-24.



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# KEYWORDS

Avant-garde poetry

*silent movies*

FRENCH FILM

IMPRESSIONNISM

**ABSTRACT:**

The article tells the story of the early relations between avant-garde silent film and poetry, with a particular focus on critical texts and artistic manifestos from French Impressionist cinema. The poetry or poetic features of art were often evoked metaphorically in the manifestos and other writings produced by Ricciotto Canudo, Germaine Dulac and Louis Delluc. Poetry was treated as a general notion, affiliated with film, often called the “seventh art” and regarded to be the perfect synthesis of all the other arts. Jean Epstein, whose texts and manifestos were very popular in Poland in the 1920s, explicitly linked his theory of film to avant-garde poetry. I argue that many elements of Epstein’s theory, especially in regard to camera movement and *photogénie*, influenced critical texts and manifestos of the poetic avant-garde in Poland.



, **AVANT - GARDE  
POETRY AND  
FILM CONSTRUCTION  
AFFINITIES**

**JEAN EPSTEIN**

*T a d e u s z   P e i p e r*

**AVANT - GARDE POETRY  
AND FILM PROGRAMMATIC  
STATEMENTS**

**NOTE ON THE AUTHORS:**

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# “A New Wave Film”. Cinema’s Role in the Poetry of Generation ’68

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White spots, empty frames

This text, devoted to the role of film in the poetry of Generation ’68, came about for three reasons. The first one is the scarcity of available materials, although admittedly, there is some interest in the relationships between film and literature: in recent years there have been at least three issues of well-established journals devoted strictly to such relationships<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, the large number of topics discussed in literary studies monographs further highlights the scarcity of studies into film’s influence on poetry. Hence we have several-year-old cross-sectional overviews by Rafał Koschany: *Pograniczność sztuki i filmoznanstwo interdyscyplinarne. Przykład poezji “filmowej”* [The borderline character of art and interdisciplinary film

<sup>1</sup> See “Przestrzenie Teorii” 32, 2019: *Literatura w medium filmu* [Literature in the medium of film], “Tekstualia” 2020, No 1: *Literatura a sztuka filmowa* [Literature vs. the art of film], “Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2020, No 2: *Film – Media – Literatura* [Film – Media – Literature].

studies. The example of "film" poetry] and *Literackie filmy urojone*<sup>2</sup> [Literary films imagined], both of which stem from his 1999 M.A. thesis: *Filmowość poezji polskiej XX wieku (po 1945 roku)* [The "film-like" character of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish poetry (after 1945)], as well as *Poezja filmowa – film poetycki* [Film poetry – poetic film] by Przemysław Kantyka. However, this is not much given the significance and scope of the topic, even if one was to search for insights into Polish poetry and film in publications on specific authors and analyses of the presence of a given actor in literature<sup>3</sup>.

The second reason is the insufficient amount of attention given to poetry from the period between World War Two and the 1989 transformation. If there are any studies focused on this topic, they are mostly devoted to the interwar period<sup>4</sup>, or the generation of the 1960s (and younger poets)<sup>5</sup>. *Zawrót głowy. Antologia wierszy filmowych*<sup>6</sup> [Dizziness. An anthology of film poems] by Darek Foks provides a impetus for change in this area. However, individual papers and a fresh anthology awaiting interpreters of its contents is still not enough.

The third and final reason is related to the deficit in functionalizations of film elements in poetry that is not limited to individual works. Although he looks at post-1945 works, Koschany explains that "[...] in the proposed text I focus strictly on the theoretical level: how possible is an interdisciplinary reflection on the presence of film in poetry?"<sup>7</sup>. He is mostly interested in the type of film presence rather than in the role of cinema as it can be "interpreted" on the basis of poems. Foks writes a separate chapter on metaphorical meanings – *Film jako metafora, język poezji i język filmu* [Film as a metaphor, the language of poetry, and the language of film] – similarly to the authors of the English anthology he refers to, *The Faber Book of Movie Verse*. However, unlike Philip French, he does not highlight the fact that most poems could actually

<sup>2</sup> See Rafał Koschany, "Pograniczność sztuki i filmoznawstwo interdyscyplinarne. Przykład poezji 'filmowej'" [Borders of art and interdisciplinary film studies. An example of 'film' poetry], *Człowiek i Społeczeństwo* 34 (2012): 79–91; Rafał Koschany, "Literackie filmy urojone", in: *Kino, którego nie ma* [Cinema that does not exist], edited by Piotr Zwierzchowski and Adam Wierski (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2014), 54–71; Przemysław Kantyka, "Poezja filmowa – film poetycki" [Film poetry – poetic film], *Media – Kultura – Komunikacja Społeczna* 7 (2011): 153–166.

<sup>3</sup> See Rafał Koschany, "Chaplin jako Charlie. Od figury kina do figury poetyckiej" [Chaplin as Charlie. From a cinematic to a poetic figure], *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 37–38 (2002): 82–90; Aleksander Wójtowicz, "Charlie w Inkipo. Chaplin według Pierwszej Awangardy" [Charlie in Inkipo. Chaplin according to the First Avant-garde], *Kwartalnik Filmowy* 70 (2010): 6–14; Robert Birkholz, "Charlie Chaplin w modernizmie wernakularnym polskiego dwudziestolecia międzywojennego" [Charlie Chain in the Polish vernacular modernism of the interwar period], *Tekstualia* 57, No 2 (2019): 19–35; Kamila Czaja, "Widmo bogartowskie. Literackie nawiedzenia" [The spectre of Bogart. Literary hauntings], *FA-art* 90, No 4 (2012): 37–51; Kamila Czaja, "Być 'Bogie'em'? O cytowaniu Bogarta i *Casablanki* w literaturze" [Being 'Bogie'? On quoting Bogart and *Casablanca* in literature], in: *Opus citatum. O cytacie w kulturze* [On quoting in literature], edited by Anna Jarmuszkiewicz and Justyna Tabaszewska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2014), 109–120.

<sup>4</sup> For an extensive list of references see Koschany, "Literackie filmy urojone".

<sup>5</sup> See Krzysztof Jaworski, "Zabawy medialne w poezji polskiej po roku 1989 (kilka uwag z perspektywy uczestnika i obserwatora)" [Media games in the post-1989 Polish poetry (some insights from the perspective of a participant and an observer)], in: *Literatura w mediach. Media w literaturze. Doświadczenia odbioru* [Literature in media. Media in literature. Experiences of reception], Katarzyna Taborska and Wojciech Kuska [eds.] (Gorzów Wielkopolski: Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Gorzowie Wielkopolskim, 2010), 97–106.

<sup>6</sup> See *Zawrót głowy. Antologia polskich wierszy filmowych* [Dizziness. An anthology of film poems], Darek Foks (ed.) (Łódź: Narodowe Centrum Kultury Filmowej, 2018). Foks significantly extended the time scope of his earlier interests (see *Niewinni kaznodzieje. Filmowy zestaw wierszy poetów polskich urodzonych w latach 1958–1985* [Innocent preachers. A film anthology of poetry by Polish poets born in 1958–1985], Darek Foks (ed.) (Warszawa–Skierniewice: Polska Federacja Dyskusyjnych Klubów Filmowych, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Koschany, "Pograniczność sztuki i filmoznawstwo interdyscyplinarne", 83.

be placed in the chapter *Movie as Metaphor*<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile, what is most interesting is looking at film in poetry as a “tool” that allows us to say something that would be difficult to express using more abstract methods.

It is even possible to think of film in poetry as one big metaphor, and of film motifs as means of expression which have a more general sense, or a sense referring to a different area of reality than the one to which a given work is directly devoted<sup>9</sup> – beyond its openly communicated meaning. The conclusions of scholars of conceptual metaphors are also inspiring, especially in terms of structural metaphors. As explained by Olaf Jäkel, more *abstract* and complex target domains (X) are typically conceptualized through *more concrete*, simply structured and easily cognizable source domains (Y)<sup>10</sup>. An interpretative approach in the spirit of LIFE IS FILM<sup>11</sup> would allow one to read the “sensually cognizable” elements of film art as a means of verbalizing existential experiences and dilemmas in poetry.

In the introduction to *Zawrót głowy* Foks quotes an essay by Kacper Bartczak about *Paterson*. Among others, the following passage stands out: “The aesthetics of Jarmusch’s films and the poetry in its service carries beauty and light with it”<sup>12</sup>. The present paper would be about the opposite direction: about film in the service of poetry, and more specifically – of the poetry of selected representatives of the poetic New Wave. As observed by Adam Poprawa, “New Wave was the first generation that treated popular culture seriously. Out of New Wave’s representatives, Barańczak treated it the most conscientiously”<sup>13</sup>. Foks also lists Barańczak (alongside Antoni Słonimski)<sup>14</sup> and many poems by other New Wave poets<sup>15</sup> in his anthology. In the present paper, Barańczak’s works also chart the way, but his texts will enter into dialogue with poems by Adam Zagajewski, Ewa Lipska and Julian Kornhauser<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> See Philip French, “Introduction: A Poet and Pedant Overture”, in: *The Faber Book of Movie Verse*, Philip French and Ken Wlaschin (ed.) (Londyn–Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Janusz Sławiński, “Wielka metafora” [Grand metaphor], in: *Słownik terminów literackich* [A dictionary of literary terms], Janusz Sławiński (ed.) (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 2008), 612.

<sup>10</sup> Olaf Jäkel, *Metaphors in Abstract Domains of Discourse, Polish translation by Monika Banaś and Bronisław Drag* (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 28. *Zob. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors we live by*, Polish translation by Tomasz P. Krzeszowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Aletheia, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Although this phrase does not appear in *Metaphors we live by*, but LIFE IS A PLAY can be found in *More than Cool Reason. A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 20–23 by Lakoff and Turner. This idea was later developed into LIFE AS A SHOW (Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor in Culture. Universality and Variation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 184–189) and LIFE IS A MOVIE (see Carina Rasse, Alexander Onysko and Francesca Citron, “Conceptual metaphors in poetry interpretation: a psycholinguistic approach”, *Language and Cognition* 12, No 2 (2020): 329).

<sup>12</sup> Kacper Bartczak, “Ciemna materia i błona wiersza” [Dark matter and the membrane of a poem], <https://www.biurroliterackie.pl/biblioteka/recenzje/ciemna-materia-blona-wiersza/> (date of access: 7.01.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Adam Poprawa, “Posłowie” [Afterword], in: Stanisław Barańczak, *Odbiorca ubezwłasnowolniony. Teksty o kulturze masowej i popularnej* [Incapacitated recipient. Texts on mass and popular culture], Adam Poprawa (ed.) (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Ossolineum, 2017), 493.

<sup>14</sup> See Darek Foks, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in: *Zawrót głowy*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Poems quoted in this paper, which also appear in Foks’s anthology, are described with ZG with a page number (following a comma) apart from a regular reference. Some of them are mentioned by Kantyka in the appendix to his paper (see Kantyka, “Poezja filmowa – film poetycki” [Film poetry – poetic film], 164).

<sup>16</sup> Ryszard Krynicki will not be discussed here. Compared to his New Wave peers, he does not use as many film means. In *Zawrót głowy* Foks only includes one poem of his, *Bezpłatne* [Free of charge] (ZG, 101), about commercials; *Ktoś, Kaspar Hauser* [Someone, Kaspar Hauser] could also be mentioned, but here the film interpretation is only apparent in Krynicki’s footnote.

## Ethics and (film) poetics

In the ninth part of *Przywracanie porządku*<sup>17</sup> [Restoring order] (WZSB, 281–282; ZG, 165), Barańczak juxtaposes two attitudes from the Polish martial law period. A film-derived metaphor was already used for the addressee of those verses, an internee called "W". (Wojciech Wołyński<sup>18</sup>):

[...] the same style,  
the same moustache *à la* Jack Nicholson in *The Last Detail*<sup>19</sup>

This is followed by the ethical approaches of dissidents and officials who were part of the system, defined by means of a comparison to the process of selecting a film from a repertoire<sup>20</sup>:

But they went to see different films. For them  
being a man meant carrying a gun,  
driving a fast car, wheels screeching on turns,  
and shooting professionally, from a half knee bend, holding the gun in both hands.  
For us adulthood was more like the crooked smile of  
Humphrey Bogart, ironic bitterness,  
which needs to be swallowed, for it is rude to spit it out in company.<sup>21</sup>

Poprawa stresses that what is interesting about this poem is that "the difference here does not separate films by someone like Antonioni from commercial films, but Humphrey Bogart from action films"<sup>22</sup>. However, there are more surprising examples, as well – in a poem by Julian Kornhauser, *Spacer z Holubem w maju 1996 roku*<sup>23</sup> [A walk with Holub in May 1996] (WZJK, 523; ZG, 239) a cartoon character breaks the gloomy mood of writings on walls:

<sup>17</sup>Barańczak's poems are from: Stanisław Barańczak, *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected poems] (Kraków: a5, 2007), henceforth WZSB, with a page number following a comma.

<sup>18</sup>See Adam Poprawa, "Krytyka filmowa Barańczaka" [Barańczak's film criticism], in: *Literatura polska w świecie. Tom VI. Barańczak. Postscriptum* [Polish literature in the world. Vol. VI. Barańczak. Postscriptum], Romuald Cudak and Karolina Pospiszil (eds.) (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Gnome, 2016), 107.

<sup>19</sup>[...] ten sam fason,  
ten sam wąs *à la* Jack Nicholson w *Ostatnim zadaniu*

<sup>20</sup>To refer to the ending of the poem 14.12.79: *Wieczór autorski* [Reading] (WZSB, 235), about a scene of a Security Service revision: "They did not work long, for there was a film on TV and a man is just a man", which highlights another clash of attitudes: "Tautological saying – a man is just a man – is typically used to make excuses for some weakness. Here, combined with a plan to turn on the TV in the evening, it looks like an anthropological self-creation of the Security Service agents" (Poprawa, "Krytyka filmowa Barańczaka", 107). The agents are going to see a film, and in the meantime: "An actress was waisting her talent on collecting signatures and contributions" (*Dyletanci* [Dilletantes], WZSB, 289–290).

<sup>21</sup>Tyle że oni chodzili na inne filmy. Dla nich  
być mężczyzną oznaczało nosić kaburę pod pachą,  
jeździć szybkim samochodem, z piskiem opon na zakrętach,  
i strzelać fachowo, z półprzysiadu, trzymając pistolet oburącz.  
Dla nas dorosłość była raczej jak skrzywienie ust  
Humphreya Bogarta, ironiczna gorycz,  
którą trzeba przełknąć, bo wypluć w towarzystwie nie wypada.

<sup>22</sup>Adam Poprawa, "Barańczak. 14 akapitów" [Barańczak. 14 paragraphs], *Czas Kultury* 184, No 1 (2015): 120.

<sup>23</sup>Kornhauser's poems are taken from: Julian Kornhauser, *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected poems] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo WBPiCAK, 2016), henceforth WZJK, with a page number following a comma.

“*Jude raus! Tu rządzi Wisła*” [Wisła rules here], “*Jude gang. Cracovia pany!*” [Cracovia masters], “*Polska dla Polaków*” [Poland for Poles]. The last one is annotated: “*Kaczor Donald też był Polakiem*” [Donald Duck was Polish too].

Poprawa’s proposal to read a passage from *Przywracanie porządku*, submerged in popculture, in a perverse dialogue with Herbert’s *Potęga smaku*<sup>24</sup> [A matter of taste], is inspiring. This reference seems to be meaningful beyond pure polemics, for: “In *Przywracanie porządku* from *Atlantyda* [Atlantis] the choice of genre is of ethical, political and social significance – all of this stems from “They went to see different films”<sup>25</sup> – a laconic phrase explaining a moral abyss. But why Bogart?

Marek Hłasko<sup>26</sup> and Marek Bieńczyk recall an anecdote about the actor’s facial expression; the latter devotes significant attention to Bogart’s face in his essay *O trzy drinki do tyłu*<sup>27</sup> [Three drinks behind]. His main focus is on the “ironic bitterness” hiding behind the “crooked smile”<sup>28</sup> accentuated in Barańczak’s poem. This topic requires longer treatment<sup>29</sup>, but it should suffice here to recall that Bogart “created the first genuine ‘loser’ in the history of American cinema, a man doomed to constant failure, and because he was aware of his imminent doom”<sup>30</sup>, his face “expressed a conviction that life is deprived of meaning, and yet we are still obliged to live it with dignity, live up to our own idea of ourselves, that it is fighting with our own weaknesses matters – rather than victories”<sup>31</sup>. Aleksander Jackiewicz writes: “Perhaps he is the last Conrad-style character [...]. He knows that the world is badly organized, and that one no longer needs to pretend to be a saint. One only has to stick to their own moral principles – not for others, but for oneself”<sup>32</sup>, and Stefan Kanfer, author of Bogart’s biography, diagnoses: “It was not a proud, confident gate that testified to his masculinity, but the opposite – calm, bitter cognition of reality and the way in which it should be accepted, how it should be approached, and – sometimes – how it should be opposed”<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, those characteristics do not sound like an adequate description of the attitude chosen by the oppressed yet unyielding positive characters of *Przywracanie porządku*, and they coordinate with the fatalism of the final words addressed at W.:

<sup>24</sup>See Adam Poprawa, “Nieufność i afirmacja. O kulturze masowej w twórczości Stanisława Barańczaka” [Distrust and affirmation. On mass culture in Barańczak’s work], *Literatura i Kultura Popularna* 3 (1992): 96; Poprawa, “Posłowie”, 493.

<sup>25</sup>Poprawa, “Barańczak. 14 akapitów”, 120.

<sup>26</sup>See Marek Hłasko, *Piękni, dwudziestolenni* [Beautiful twentysomethings] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1989), 121–122.

<sup>27</sup>See Marek Bieńczyk, “O trzy drinki do tyłu” [By three drinks behind], in: Marek Bieńczyk, *Książka twarzy* [Book of face] (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2011), 78–80.

<sup>28</sup>Poetry in English also provides some examples, such as “lip curled so nasty” highlighted by Lee L. Berkson in *Bogey* (*The Faber Book of Movie Verse*, 199). “It’s all in the corner of his mouth” in *Nobody Dies Like Humphrey Bogart* (*The Faber Book of Movie Verse*, 198–199) by Norman Rosten.

<sup>29</sup>See Czaja, “Widmo bogartowskie. Literackie nawiedzenia”; Czaja, “Być ‘Bogie’em”? O cytowaniu Bogarta i *Casablanki* w literaturze”.

<sup>30</sup>Grażyna Stachówna, “Pięćdziesiąt cztery lata oglądania *Casablanki*” [54 years of watching *Casablanca*], *Dialog* 476, No 7 (1996): 141.

<sup>31</sup>Jacek Tabęcki, “Humphrey Bogart: W czasie i poza czasem” [Humphrey Bogart. In and beyond time], *Iluzjon* 18, No 2 (1985): 14.

<sup>32</sup>Aleksander Jackiewicz, “Zapiski krytyczne. Bogart” [Critical notes. Bogart], *Film* 909, No 19 (1966): 14.

<sup>33</sup>Stefan Kanfer, *Tough Without a Gun: The Life and Extraordinary Afterlife of Humphrey Bogart*, Polish translation by Bożena Markiewicz (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2012), 255.

That picture of yours: prince Poniatowski  
 jumping towards Estera, with sideboards, of course,  
 when a horse comments: "I knew this is what it would end like".  
 Take care, W. Say something like that.<sup>34</sup>

A film antinomy arises from a clash of attitudes in the self-deprecating *Drobnomieszczańskie cnoty* [Petit bourgeois virtues] (WZSB, 354–355), which is on the list of differences between B. and J. In the context of his insufferably non-scandalous biography, the "incurable top of the class" admits that:

I know, this is no material for a myth, cult, legend,  
 A De Niro film, braking glass and scenes.<sup>35</sup>

Lech Giemza sees in those lines an accumulation of revealing rituality, a repetitiveness of gestures by a tragic artist<sup>36</sup>. Of course with time the poem reveals its gloomy depth, there is "a suggestion that a truly dark darkness may lurk in the apparent petit bourgeois, that a correctly tied tie may be the last thing that stands between it and complete disintegration"<sup>37</sup>.

*Drobnomieszczańskie cnoty* received a poetic answer. Jacek Bierezin, claiming that he is the "J. artist", wrote *Wielomiesięczne kryzysy* [Months-long crises], at the same time specifying the film contexts of the attitude which he was defending:

I know, this is material for myth, cult, legend,  
 De Niro, Micky Rourke film, marines, ring  
 and breaking glass. [...] <sup>38</sup>

In the New Wave's use of film, extreme attitudes – political (*Przywracanie porządku*) and artistic-existential (*Drobnomieszczańskie cnoty* vs *Wielomiesięczne kryzysy*) – are accompanied by a criticized attitude reflecting withdrawal, escapism, and an indifference to reality. *Łzy w kinie* [Tears in the cinema] by Barańczak (WZSB, 435–436; ZG, 135–136) is the most common example. The poem exposes the hypocrisy of cinema emotions and spiritual pauperization

<sup>34</sup> Ten twój obrazek: księżę Poniatowski  
 skaczący do Elstery, z baczkami, a jakże,  
 gdy koń wygłasza komentarz: "Wiedziałem, że tak się to skończy".  
 Trzymaj się, W. Machnij znowu coś w tym stylu.

<sup>35</sup> Ja wiem, to nie materiał na mit, kult, legendę,  
 film z Robertem De Niro, tłuczeniem szkła i scenami.

<sup>36</sup> See Lech Giemza, "Ironiczny autoportret Stanisława Barańczaka" [Barańczak's ironic self-portrait], *Napis* 14 (2008): 429.

<sup>37</sup> Michał Okoński, Adam Szostkiewicz, "Poeta w krawacie" [an interview with Stanisław Barańczak] [A tie-wearing poet], *Tygodnik Powszechny* No 51–52 (1994): 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ja wiem, to jest materiał na mit, kult, legendę,  
 film z Robertem De Niro, Micky'm Rourke, *marines*, ringiem  
 i tłuczeniem szkła. [...]

Jacek Bierezin, "Wielomiesięczne kryzysy" [Months-long crises], in: *Określona epoka. Nowa Fala 1968–1993. Wiersze i komentarze* [A defined epoch. New Wave 1968–1993. Poems and comments], edited by Tadeusz Nyczek (Kraków: Oficyna Literacka, 1994), 45–46; the previous version does not contain the phrase "Micky'm Rourke" (see. *Na Głos* 29, No 4 (1991): 65–66). See also: Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, "Potępięcze swary? O sporze Bierezina z Barańczakiem" [Hellish conflicts? On the conflict between Bierezin and Barańczak], *Polonistyka* 384, No 4 (2001): 220–224.

which makes visits to the cinema “the modern equivalent of the penance and reconciliation sacrament”<sup>39</sup>. The “repentance” expressed by a viewer:

[...] since the last screening once again I have been unable to live in beauty, in the land of Sense and Glaze, in such a lively, human, full, genuine, indisputable way as actors in a film,<sup>40</sup>

is a dream about life which, despite all of these emotions, would be apparent, inhuman – although probably simpler, in line with some imposed screenplay, deprived of doubts, insecurity, aporia (“indisputable”). Poprawa highlights the relationship between this poem and *Jak słodko płakać na Love Story* [How sweet it is to cry on *Love Story*] by Barańczak<sup>41</sup>, adding that “this is what cultural criticism is for, so that facilitations – aesthetic and existential – can be avoided. Hence maximalism”<sup>42</sup>. Agnieszka Czyżak writes about “the ultimate victory of external illusions of human success as their conclusive measure (both of man and success)”<sup>43</sup>. Similar film illusions (which, however, can be explained with youthful naivety) appear in a poem by Ewa Lipska *O czym myśli dziewczyna na lekcji gramatyki języka polskiego*<sup>44</sup> [What a girl dreams about on a lesson on Polish grammar]:

He will step down from a photograph from an illustrated magazine, in tight shorts which he will be recommending for the summer. Or from the screen. With Godard’s twilight and a wild rose he will replace dubbing for us.<sup>45</sup>

Escapes – apart from internal pauperization – can lead to indifference towards real wrongs. Barańczak’s poem, *Kasety* [Tapes] (WZSB, 437; ZG, 320) is a vision in which rented disaster films overshadow real events:

[...] Shadows of news, relegated to the background,  
were hiding in the CRT – their genuine  
newsreel? – for him it was no longer certain, for the abundance  
of crimes getting wilder by the day would be deemed  
even by the most unrefined screenwriter as

<sup>39</sup>Piotr Bogalecki, “Niepodjęta terapia Stanisława Barańczaka. Próba diagnozy postsekularnej” [Stanisław Barańczak’s therapy which never began. An attempt at a post-secular diagnosis], in: Piotr Bogalecki, *Szczęśliwe winy teolingwizmu. Polska poezja po roku 1968 w perspektywie postsekularnej* [Fortunate faults of teolinguistics. Post-1968 Polish poetry from the post-secular perspective] (Kraków: Universitas, 2016), 212.

<sup>40</sup>[...] od ostatniego seansu znów nie zdołałem żyć w pięknie, w krainie Sensu i Glansu, w sposób tak żywy, człowieczy, pełny, prawdziwy, bezsprzeczny jak żyją aktorzy w filmie”

<sup>41</sup>Adam Poprawa, “Mitologie Barańczaka. Wypisy porównawcze” [Barańczak’s mythologies. Comparative notes], in: “Obchodzę urodziny z daleka...” *Szkice o Stanisławie Barańczaku* [“I am celebrating my birthday from afar...” Sketches on Stanisław Barańczak], Joanna Dembińska-Pawelec and Dariusz Pawelec (eds.) (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007), 36.

<sup>42</sup>Poprawa, “Krytyka filmowa Barańczaka”, 103.

<sup>43</sup>Agnieszka Czyżak, “Kwestia wyboru” [A matter of choice], in: *Poeta i duch wolności. Szkice o twórczości Stanisława Barańczaka* [Poet and the spirit of freedom. Sketches on Barańczak’s works], edited by Piotr Śliwiński (Poznań: Wydawnictwo WBPiCAK, 2016), 208.

<sup>44</sup>Ewa Lipska, “O czym myśli dziewczyna na lekcji gramatyki języka polskiego” [What a girl dreams about on a lesson on Polish grammar], in: Ewa Lipska, *Dom Spokojnej Młodości. Wiersze wybrane* [Young people’s home. Selected poems] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1979), 69.

<sup>45</sup>Zejdzie z fotografii pisma ilustrowanego w obcisłych szortach które poleca na lato. Albo z ekranu. Ze zmierzchem Godarda i z dziką różą która zastąpi nam dubbing.



the exaggerated pessimism of Truth, whose disdain for humanity  
is such that even he himself rarely uses its materials<sup>46</sup>

Giving in to the catastrophism of film productions "can be a form of escapism", <sup>47</sup> as Poprawa observes, recalling Jerzy Kandziora's interpretation, that "a greatly mysterious [...] person-viewer of catastrophic films, who simultaneously loses sight of everyday crimes and dramas that take place on that planet"<sup>48</sup> is presented here.

These universal escapes from responsibility can be supplemented by criticism of political indifference or simply being used to the state of affairs in the People's Poland's. One example is *Tak naprawdę* [Actually] by Kornhauser (WZJK, 329; ZG, 167) – a poem in which a reversal of ethical order: "a boy reading 'Ekran' [Screen]", admiring the body of an actress on a magazine cover, who himself starts to display characteristics of a colorful illusion:

motionless  
clinging to the surface of the street  
cut out from colorful paper<sup>49</sup>

Due to the advantage of this form of entertainment, among noisy tram bells ("rolling stock staff always with the party") what should inspire resistance – loses significance:

more important [...]  
[...]  
from a group of attackers  
twisting the arms of the man they caught  
and the scream  
they are taking daddy away!<sup>50</sup>

In *Za nas, z nami* [For us, with us] (WZJK, 321), "we go to the cinema every day" is one of the signs of indifference to the fact that "they" are actually "fighting with us", and not "for us". In an ironic "essay" about the countryside (*Wolny temat* [Free topic], WZJK, 276; ZG, 166) "the

<sup>46</sup> [...]. W kineskopie kryły się cienie  
zepchniętych kasetą na dalszy plan wydarzeń dnia – rzeczywista  
ich kronika? – dla niego nie było to już pewne, bo zatrzęsienie  
codziennie dzikszymi zbrodniami niewybredny nawet scenarzysta  
uznałby za przesadny pesymizm Prawdy, której pogarda  
dla ludzi jest taka, że on sam z materiałów jej rzadko korzysta

<sup>47</sup>Poprawa, "Krytyka filmowa Barańczaka", 104.

<sup>48</sup>Jerzy Kandziora, *Ocalony w gmachu wiersza. O poezji Stanisława Barańczaka* [Rescued in the edifice of a poem. On Barańczak's poetry] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2007), 288.

<sup>49</sup>nieruchomy  
przylegający do powierzchni ulicy  
wycięty z kolorowego papieru

<sup>50</sup>ważniejszy [...]  
[...]  
od grupy napastników  
wykręcających ręce złapanemu mężczyźnie  
i okrzyku  
zabierają tatusia!

cinema often arrives to the community hall”<sup>51</sup>. In Barańczak’s poem *N.N. staje przed oknem* [John Doe (WZSB, 152) the following line expresses the suffocating invariability of an oppressive situation: [...] as if at any moment that crowd was leaving the “Tęcza” cinema [...].<sup>52</sup>

The “lullaby of a high-class TV film”<sup>53</sup> – part of Barańczak’s list in *Co jest grane* [What’s on] (WZSB, 164) – is one well-known example of a perfidious “anesthetic” to reality, in which “the problem of make-believe existence, among red herrings”<sup>54</sup>, when “the truth is concealed and curbed by various, ritualistic shows, which dramatize reality and reach their objective [...]”<sup>55</sup>. And although due to the fact that the material is diametrically different (a moving documentary), and the complexity of the problem of representing Shoah, Zagajewski’s poem *Oglądając “Shoah” w pokoju hotelowym, w Ameryce*<sup>56</sup> [Watching “Shoah” in a hotel room, in America] (WWAZ, 134) would require a longer interpretation, it is hard to resist a similar association – for interruptions in the reception of the terror of the film result not only from the ongoing hotel party, the geographical and temporal distance, the fact that the viewer himself is not the victim, but also from the screen mediation “and the one-eyed TV set indifferently shuffles pictures”, “and they were greeting me coldly from the screen”,

The TV set reassured me: both of us  
are beyond any suspicion<sup>57</sup>

Reaching for film in New Wave poetry is thus related to choosing an ethical attitude and attempts at influencing individuals, in order to dull vigilance and detach from reality. The negative role dominates – although in *Przywracanie porządku* both attitudes are presented with the use of film elements, and *Drobnomieszczańskie cnoty* as well as *Wielomiesięczne kryzysy* are different evaluations of the same onscreen model, in these poems, film enslaves, simplifies, desensitizes. But what about situations when it is not about the choice of an ethical attitude, but about the somewhat imposed existential condition and the elements of the world which one tries to “domesticate” with the use of film?

<sup>51</sup>Kornhauser’s prose offers a more nuanced picture of cinema’s influence: propaganda films with those shaping ethics coexist here: “I am watching with shining eyes how Native American heroes and those from Podhale were yelling slogans about freedom (perhaps not very understandable for a young boy), as well as easily understood phrases, wise phrases about friendship and betrayal” (Julian Kornhauser, *Dom, sen i gry dziecięce* [House, dream, and children’s games] (Kraków: Znak, 1995), 30). Quoted from: Ryszard Waksmund, “Historia dzieciństwa – historia kina” [History of childhood – history of cinema], *Studia Filmoznawcze* 33 (2012), 181.

<sup>52</sup>[...] jakby w każdej chwili  
wychodził z kina Tęcza” ten tłum [...].

<sup>53</sup>Poprawa suspects that it was *The Forsyte Saga* (see *Poprawa* “Posłowie”, 490). There are more examples of Barańczak’s critical view on television, although they tend to refer to news, for instance *To, co jest wierszem nie do pomyślenia* [What is an unthinkable poem] (WZSB, 208–209): “in the sleepy roar of the screen, in front of which / we spend / (arm by arm) / every evening”, or a later poem from *Podróż zimowa – IX* [Wylączany telewizor...] (WZSB, 398): [A winter trip – IX, We are turning the TV off...]: “We are turning the TV off / into the black tunnel of the CRT / all reality is sucked, / so that we can sleep better”.

<sup>54</sup>Dariusz Pawelec, *Czytając Barańczaka* [Reading Barańczak] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Gnome, 1995), 81.

<sup>55</sup>Danuta Opacka-Walasek, “...ta próba jest grana tak, że się na raz dzieją wszystkie sceny”. Teatralizacje Stanisława Barańczaka”, [‘...this rehearsal is played in such a way that all the scenes are taking place simultaneously’ in: *Literatura polska w świecie. Tom VI. Barańczak. Postscriptum*, 32.

<sup>56</sup>Unless a different reference is provided, Zagajewski’s poems are taken from: Adam Zagajewski, *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected poems] (Kraków: a5, 2017), henceforth WWAZ, with page number following a comma.

<sup>57</sup>Telewizor zapewniał mnie: my obaj  
jesteśmy poza wszelkim podejrzeniem

## To be like... Laurel and Hardy?

In Barańczak's poem *Ziemia usuwała się spod nóg* [The ground slips away from under one's feet] (WZSB, 304), among the many variants of the titular situation, there is also the following one:

and the ground was slipping away from under feet, a carpet  
secretly snatched away in a silent comedy; no worse than Laurel or Hardy  
you lost balance and, to avoid a fall,  
you stretched your arms awkwardly, in an imitation, quite successful by the way,  
of a newcomer, who is already welcoming a new land; and you would continue playing that role,  
but the voice appointed accurate and celestial controls for you<sup>58</sup>

In the simplest conceptualization this is a vision of an emigrant's feelings – which, by the way, is not the only ones expressed via film-related symbols. For in the essay *E.E., przybysz z innego świata* [E.E., a newcomer from a different world], Barańczak writes: "[...] a typical Eastern European (let's use the abbreviation E.E., which additionally has the advantage of resembling the initials E.T., the alien from the popular film) [...]"<sup>59</sup>. Poprawa observes that: "The self-mockery is further reinforced by the reference to the movie *E.T.*, and Steven Spielberg, who as one may suppose, did not belong to directors especially appreciated by Barańczak"<sup>60</sup>. We should also notice the simplest self-mockery: the juxtaposition of the protagonist with the adorable, yet not very beautiful alien. In the poem, the "newcomer" is compared to Laurel or Hardy, who are better known in Poland as the duo Flip and Flap. Krzysztof Biedrzycki interprets this poem through the sacral key<sup>61</sup>. Katarzyna Mulet argues with this line of interpretation, highlighting the existential motifs<sup>62</sup>. But what about the film comparison, how does it work here? According to Beata Przymuszała, this time the film frame of "a carpet / secretly snatched away in a silent comedy" is introduced. The jocular gesture of depriving someone of a stable footing not only attracts attention to the question of the possible perpetrator of the situation, but first and foremost, it takes away the seriousness of the situation – it is a comic relief [...]. Interestingly, the film-like "slipping away of the ground" is shown as an opportunity for "entering the role": the poem's protagonist talks about imitating "the role of a newcomer, who is already welcoming a new land" [...]. And though it would seem that this is more of a scene being played out for people who came to the airport to bid farewell than an

<sup>58</sup> a ziemia usuwała się spod nóg, wyszarpięty ukradkiem  
dywanik w niemej komedii; nie gorzej niż Hardy czy Laurel  
traciłeś równowagę i, ratując się przed upadkiem,  
machając niezgrabnie rękami, w imitacji, dość nawet udatnej,  
przybysza, który już wita nowy ląd; i grałbyś jeszcze tę rolę,  
lecz głos wyznaczał ci celne i celestialne kontrole

<sup>59</sup> Stanisław Barańczak, "E.E., przybysz z innego świata" [E.E., a newcomer from a different world], in: Stanisław Barańczak, *Tablica z Macondo. Osiemnaście prób wytłumaczenia, po co i dlaczego się pisze* [Macondo board. 18 attempts at explaining why and what for we write] (London: Wydawnictwo "Aneks", 1990), 191.

<sup>60</sup> Poprawa, "Krytyka filmowa Barańczaka", 109.

<sup>61</sup> See Krzysztof Biedrzycki, *Świat poezji Stanisława Barańczaka* [The world of Barańczak's poetry] (Kraków: Universitas, 1995), 255–256.

<sup>62</sup> See Katarzyna Mulet, "Trauma wyobcowania w *Atlantydzie* i innych wierszach Stanisława Barańczaka" [The trauma of alienation in *Atlantida* and other Barańczak's poems], in: *Literatura polska obu Ameryk. Studia i szkice. Seria pierwsza* [Polish literature of both Americas. Studies and sketches. First series], edited by Beata Nowacka and Bożena Szałasta-Rogowska (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2014), 369.

attempt at shortening the distance between people by reducing one's own fears of experiencing the protagonists of a bad film gag, it does not seem that the surroundings were significant for the narrator<sup>63</sup>.

In spite of the accuracy of many of the above-mentioned comments, it seems a good idea to highlight the ambiguity of the reference to Laurel and Hardy. Indeed, the lack of seriousness may concern the audience's reaction, but it comes at a high price. For the man functioning here "no worse than Laurel or Hardy" – and both the choice of one of the co-appearing "elements", and reversing the typical order of names (even if this is to maintain rhyme) increase anxiety – such a diagnosis seems to be rather tragic, and in the best case: tragicomic. The gag character is doomed to fall to make others laugh – and moreover, he is mute. This vision is even more cruel than the one observed by Marcin Jaworski – that on the basis of the American poems by Barańczak, a self-definition of the poet emerges "as the one whose voice is insecure and barely audible, to say the least"<sup>64</sup> – cited by Przymuszała, although in a different context. And yet, as Barańczak comforts himself in the essay *O pisaniu wierszy* [On writing poems], comparing writing poetry to playing "the role of a simple partner in a cabaret sketch, in which the world is the main comedian – delivering a monologue without a moment of rest, allowing no interruptions, unapologetically shouting over us"<sup>65</sup>, hope lies in the voice: "The simple partner of the comedian will eventually turn out to be the victim of his joke – the ultimate punch line belongs to the world, not to the poet. And although the poet in this role does not have the final word – at least he has a chance to say something. It is always better than being just a mute extra"<sup>66</sup>. The state of the man from the poem, the "role" of the victim in the silent gag, seems to be especially poignant.

Zagajewski refers to the same duo of comedians, this time together (without "or") in *Europa w zimie* [Europe in winter] (WWAZ, 254), dedicated to Anders Bodegård:

to enter the underground of your metro, there,  
where Persephone died, and to  
the slums, where virtue and vice  
are walking proudly like Laurel and Hardy,  
I am trying to find the addresses of execution and ecstasy<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Beata Przymuszała, "Usuwanie się ziemi – Ameryka Barańczaka" [Landslide – Barańczak's America], in: *Ameryka Barańczaka* [Barańczak's America], edited by Sylwia Karolak and Ewa Rajewska (Kraków: Universitas, 2018), 122–123.

<sup>64</sup>Marcin Jaworski, "Implozja wiersza. O amerykańskiej poezji Stanisława Barańczaka" [Implosion of a poem. On American poetry by Barańczak], in: *Poeta i duch wolności*, 152.

<sup>65</sup>Stanisław Barańczak, "O pisaniu wierszy" [On writing poems], in: Barańczak, *Tablica z Macondo*, 237.

<sup>66</sup>Barańczak, 240. In Barańczak's essays on poetry the subject of taking inspiration from mass culture, including film, is common. For example: "Człowiek, Który Za Dużo Wie" [Man who knows too much] and "Knebel i słowo. O literaturze krajowej w latach siedemdziesiątych" [Gag and word. On Polish literature in 1970s] (see for example Poprawa, "Posłowie", 486–489).

<sup>67</sup>wejść do podziemi twojego metra, tam,  
gdzie z tęsknoty umarła Persefona, i do  
biednych dzielnic, gdzie cnota i występki  
przechadzają się uroczyście jak Laurel i Hardy,  
spróbuję znaleźć adresy kaźni i ekstazy

It is not hard to arrive at a conclusion that virtue and vice appearing together, inseparable, like in the case of Laurel and Hardy<sup>68</sup>, does not characterize just the "slums" – it is an existential certainty. "Characters from silent films" can thus be a metaphor of the truth of life – whereas in another poem by Zagajewski, *Uniwersytet*<sup>69</sup> [University], they are a symbol of unnecessary, useless knowledge:

Your professors talked  
like characters from silent films.<sup>70</sup>

In the context of looking for "a different university" we should also mention the metaphor from *Zwyczajne życie* [Normal life] (WWAZ, 235): "Black cinemas crave light" – like in the mysterious, elliptical final verse of the poem: "Normal life craves".

Zagajewski presented a combination of emotions, seemingly incomprehensible, violating the decorum, and at the same time typical for a man thrown in an extreme situation, in a scene of watching a comedy film while travelling to the mother's funeral in *O mojej matce* [About my mother] (WWAZ, 314) [emphasis mine]:

and as I was flying from Houston  
to attend her funeral and *on the plane they played*  
*a comedy, and I was crying with laughter*  
*and with sorrow, and I could not say anything, and I still can't*<sup>71, 72</sup>

Film can also be helpful in a clash with finiteness – or the opposite: in an attempt at highlighting eternity. Hence in Lipska's *Sen*<sup>73</sup> [Dream] "a film about the end of the world", but also in *Moi ulubieni poeci* [My favorite poets] by Zagajewski (WWAZ, 324), "a film which was about to end" was aired above the titular characters while they were watching clouds.

In Barańczak, Laurel and Hardy (which perhaps sounds more dignified than the Polish Flip and Flap) are not the only film creations complicating an interpretation. In the poem *Za*

<sup>68</sup>Tadeusz Sławek wrote: "The saddest sight in the world / Laurel walking alone a country road / after Hardy's death / ("Flying Deuces", 1939)" (Tadeusz Sławek, "\*\*\*\* [Najsmutniejszy widok...]", [The saddest sight] in: Tadeusz Sławek, *Rozmowa* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo "Śląsk", 1985), 44).

<sup>69</sup>Adam Zagajewski, "Uniwersytet" [University], in: Adam Zagajewski, *Plótno* (Paryż: "Zeszyty Literackie", 1990), 61.

<sup>70</sup>Twoi profesorowie przemawiali  
jak bohaterowie niemych filmów.

<sup>71</sup>Interestingly, the "film-like" expression of two different reasons for crying – laughter and grief – was added later. As a result, Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel does not analyse this part, only taking note of the fact that there are two versions of the poem (see Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, "Ogień życia. Cykl wierszy Adama Zagajewskiego o matce" [Fire of life. A cycle of Zagajewski's poems about his mother], in: Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, *Utopia powtórzenia. Powtórzenie, podmiotowość, pamięć w literaturze modernizmu* [Utopia of repetition. Repetition, subjectivity, memory in the modernist literature] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2019), 257.

<sup>72</sup>i jak leciałem z Houston  
na jej pogrzeb i w samolocie wyświetlano  
komedię i jak płakałem ze śmiechu  
i z żalu, i jak nic nie umiałem powiedzieć,  
i wciąż nie umiem.

<sup>73</sup>Ewa Lipska, "Sen" [Dream], in: Ewa Lipska, *Dom Spokojnej Młodości*, 47.

*szkłem* [Behind a glass] (WZSB, 467–468; ZG, 137–138), which opens with a reference to both western films and home: “At high noon. Kitchen”, a film by Fred Zinnemann returns in the finale of that story, which only seems to be about cucumbers:

[...] Do not hide, what changes her into green, what else hides in you: for I know her, not the one of salt, not from the too lead-role born bile, this inborn resistance and stubbornness of yours, like two lines on a face – a face like the one of Gary Cooper in the famous frame, by the way also behind glass, behind a glass broken into ray-like splinters. A face with molds and everything, a trickle of sweat, folds of skin; but so brightly back then, about thirty years ago, in the screening room at the “Muza” cinema, on the walls, its plaster and paneling its screen reflection wrote: you, unfaithful Tomek, are allowed to, at noon, i.e. any time, you are allowed to check this mist on the glass of the jar, the bleeding of that glass, the pulse of a star, to check life, your own, by placing half-blind fingers on the world’s wrists<sup>74</sup>.

Poprawa points to Barańczak’s essay on the western as proof that this “performance” of Cooper’s cannot be treated fully seriously. “Although *High Noon* should be seen as a classic, it is only a western”<sup>75</sup>. However, at the same time the case of *Behind Glass* is ambiguous: “In Zinnemann’s film the character created by that actor solved a problem, and at the end of the poem he appears as another element of the sense-making indecisiveness”<sup>76</sup>. Interpreters also point out to “highlighting the situation of a life and death struggle, which takes place according to the accepted rhythm of a clock measuring the time to subsequent duels” (Iwona Misiak<sup>77</sup>), “a Christological figure” (Poprawa<sup>78</sup>) and the “illumination of memory”, which connects the poem with the biography, and moves towards “an independent life, testing everything, rebellion, distrust, freedom” (Kandziora<sup>79</sup>). However, in the context of the sheriff played by Cooper, the associations of a cinema image, remembered after many decades, with “resistance and stubbornness” should be stressed; even the original poster for *High Noon* says it is “the story of a man who was too proud to run”<sup>80</sup>. The man (or the anthropomorphized cucumber), even with all the distance imposed by the genre (western) and the jar context, would still impress with its steadfastness. And while we are on the topic of posters, numerous Polish motifs in *Za szkłem* seem to be enough to justify associations with the 1989 poster by Tomasz Sarnecki, designed for “Solidarność” (Solidarity).

<sup>74</sup>[...] Nie kryjcie, co ją zmienia w zielen, co jeszcze w was siedzi: znam ją przecież, tę nie z soli, nie z roli nazbyt pierwszoplanowej zrodzoną żółć, ten wrodzony wasz opór i upór jak dwie bruzdy na twarzy – takiej, jaką miał Gary Cooper w słynnym kadrze, też za szkłem zresztą, za strzaskaną w promienne drzazgi szybą. Twarz z brodawkami i wszystkim, strużką potu, fałdami skóry; ale tak jasno wtedy, ze trzydzieści lat temu, w salce kina “Muza”, na ścianach, na ich tynku i boazerii jej ekranowy odbłask wypisywał: wolno-ć, niewierny Tomku, w samo południe, czyli w każdej chwili, wolno ci sprawdzić tę mgiełkę na szkłe słoja, krwotok tej szyby, puls gwiazdy, sprawdzać życie, własne, na przegubach świata kładąc półślepe palce.

<sup>75</sup>Adam Poprawa, “Ogórki małosolne antropomorfizowane. Próby o wierszu *Za szkłem*” [Anthropomorphised fresh pickled cucumbers. Sketches on the poem *Za szkłem*], *Przestrzenie Teorii* 26 (2016): 187.

<sup>76</sup>Adam Poprawa, “Ogórki małosolne antropomorfizowane. Próby o wierszu *Za szkłem*” [Anthropomorphised fresh pickled cucumbers. Sketches on the poem *Za szkłem*], *Przestrzenie Teorii* 26 (2016): 187.

<sup>77</sup>Iwona Misiak, “Stanisława Barańczaka dialog chirurga i demiurga” [Barańczak’s dialogue of a surgeon and demiurge], *Teksty Drugie* 105, No 3 (2007): 88.

<sup>78</sup>Poprawa, “Ogórki małosolne antropomorfizowane”, 193.

<sup>79</sup>Kandziora, *Ocalony w gmachu wiersza*, 276.

<sup>80</sup>See for example *High Noon* (1952), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0044706/mediaviewer/rm365116416/> (date of access: 7.01.2021).

## Attempts at stopping the tape

Among existential cinema figures in poetry those numerous ones related to evanescence and memory are worth distinguishing. We can start with another "troublesome" actor from Barańczak's poem. In *Płynąc na Sutton Island* [Swimming to Sutton Island] (WZSB, 487–488), a film element which precedes the grand finale about the chances that love has in saving one from change, appears among what is, "what it was like":

the same dappled  
pair of Dalmatians is being brought onboard  
(or rather dragged) by an oldish brunette  
similar to Ali MacGraw; wet breeze hits with  
the same power, and the fact that everyone is wrong: that it is possible  
to stop something from changing with the force of pure love,  
like an island from the sea.<sup>81</sup>

The colon inspires the greatest interpretative doubts. Is everyone wrong, because they think *that* it is possible, or is everybody wrong *because it actually* is possible? "Is it possible or not to save something from changing with the force of pure love? And what is this 'something'?"<sup>82</sup> – asks Ewa Rajewska. Joanna Dembińska-Pawelec lists several interpretations, including Barańczak's conclusion:

[...] the protagonist is "surprised that everyone is wrong (and) that (in spite of the popular opinion) *it is possible* to save something from changing with the force of pure love". The final verses of the poem (and, simultaneously, the book) is a paean of praise for Enduring (or at least for its manifestation – constantly "loving" someone or something); even more so in the light of the fact that it rebels against the potency of Passing brought by experiencing<sup>83</sup>.

But if everything here is so simple, what about Ali MacGraw? Dembińska-Pawelec includes this film allusion in a list of measures thanks to which "[...] Barańczak introduces irony in order to conceal or hide the lofty character of the poem [...]"<sup>84</sup>. Rajewska also notices here a moment of hesitation – after all, MacGraw "is best known from her role in *Love Story* [...]" – a film about a great, mutual love against social conventions which requires major sacrifices,

<sup>81</sup> tę samą nakrapianą  
parę dalmatyńczyków wprowadza na pokład  
(lub jest przez nie wciągana) podobna do Ali  
McGraw starszawa brunetka; z tą samą  
mocą uderza mokra bryza i to, że wszyscy się mylą: że można  
samą siłą kochania, jak wyspę wśród morza,  
uchować coś przed zmianą.

<sup>82</sup>Ewa Rajewska, "Pauza Barańczaka" [Barańczak's pause], in: *Poeta i duch wolności*, 181.

<sup>83</sup>"Pesymista, który nie podnosi głosu. Ze Stanisławem Barańczakiem e-mailem rozmawia Michał Cichy" [A pessimist who never raises his voice. An e-mail interview with Barańczak by Michał Cichy], *Magazyn Gazety Wyborczej* 349, No 35 (1999): 21; quoted after Joanna Dembińska-Pawelec, "Wyspa wśród morza. Na marginesie wiersza Stanisława Barańczaka *Płynąc na Sutton Island*" [An island in the sea. On the margin of Barańczak's poem *Płynąc na Sutton Island*], in: *Ameryka Barańczaka*, 114.

<sup>84</sup>Dembińska-Pawelec, 115.

which still does not save the female protagonist from death”<sup>85</sup>. Despite the author’s certainty regarding what he “wanted” to write, it is difficult to ignore doubts while reading the poem; if those doubts do not stem from the punctuation of the final diagnosis, they stem from the actress’s “ghost”. Moreover, the footnote in Misiak’s text, which omits *Love Story* and instead characterizes MacGraw with her role “in a disaster film *Survive the Savage Sea* (directed by K.J. Dobson), does not clarify the situation”<sup>86</sup>.

Similar insights can accompany the poem *Poranek w Vicenzy* [Morning in Vicenza] by Zagajewski<sup>87</sup> (WWAZ, 191–192; ZG 68). The poem *In memoriam Josifowi Brodskiemu, Krzysztofowi Kieślowskiemu*, which is about the loss of two important people, concludes with the following verses:

You are no longer here, and now we’ll lead double lives, simultaneously in light and in darkness, in the bright sun of the day and in the coolness of stone corridors, in mourning and in joy.<sup>88</sup>

Considering the question of time in this poem, Danuta Opacka-Walasek explains that:

Also in *Poranek w Vicenzy*, a poem [...] whose chronotype is constructed on the experience of “now”, in that “now” retention, i.e. primary memory, constitutes the presence of the past. It is directly connected to the present moment, with the present observation [...]. The present tense leaning towards the future, saturated with the past, is captured here – like in Hussler – as a “vanishing observation”, staying behind the newly coming experience through time. In retention the past is conceptualized as something which on the one hand vanishes, and on the other – never stops existing<sup>89</sup>.

It should be highlighted that the “duality” required in the face of a loss is expressed in the phrase “we’ll lead double lives”. In this poem the “double live”, commonly associated with deceit, refers to Kieślowski’s film *The Double Life of Véronique* (which, notably, was considered kitsch by Barańczak)<sup>90</sup>.

<sup>85</sup>Rajewska, “Pauza Barańczaka”, 180. At the same time, after Poprawa’s suggestion, the scholar also highlights the ambiguity of the reference to this particular film, since Barańczak did not appreciate *Love Story* (see Rajewska, 181).

<sup>86</sup>Misiak, “Stanisława Barańczaka dialog chirurga i demiurga”, 88.

<sup>87</sup>In the case of Vicenza, the attempt at capturing time dominates. However, the New Wave poetry also offers spatial metaphors: the characterization of the titular Rue Armand Silvestre – “deprived of a good ending, / like some films” (Adam Zagajewski, “Rue Armand Silvestre”, in: Adam Zagajewski, *Asymetria* [Assymetry] (Kraków: a5, 2014), 73–74), a reference to Robert Rossellini’s film in the title of the poem *Rzym, miasto otwarte* [Rome, an open city] (Adam Zagajewski, “Rzym, miasto otwarte”, in: Adam Zagajewski, *Anteny* [Antenna] (Kraków: a5, 2005), 9–10; ZG, 329), or a reference to this production in the title of Lipska’s poem *Nowy Jork miasto porwane* [New York, a city abducted] (Ewa Lipska: “Nowy Jork miasto porwane”, in: Ewa Lipska, *Nie o śmierć tutaj chodzi, lecz o biały kordonek* [It is not about death, it is about white filoselle] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982), 7–13).

<sup>88</sup>Nie ma was i dlatego będziemy teraz wiedli podwójne życie, jednocześnie w świetle i w cieniu, w jaskrawym słońcu dnia i w chłodzie kamiennych korytarzy, w żałobie i w radości.

<sup>89</sup>Danuta Opacka-Walasek, *Chwile i eony. Obrazy czasu w polskiej poezji drugiej połowy XX wieku* [Moments and eons. Depictions of time in the Polish poetry of the second half of the 20th century] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 35, 36.

<sup>90</sup>“[...] I do not accept the division into high and low culture. The only division I accept is into valuable culture (which, to my mind, includes Bach, Shakespeare, as well as Charlie Parker and Monty Python), and culture of no value, i.e. the culture of kitsch (in which I include: Madonna, *Rambo*, as well as Tchaikovsky’s piano concert and *The Double life of Veronique*) (Stanisław Barańczak, *Odbiorca ubezwłasnowolniony*, 447).



Film elements also constitute parts of memories. Bourvil in \*\*\* [*Przyjaciele, rynek, miasto...*] [*Friends, market, city...*] by Kornhauser (WZJK, 159), the cinema from Zagajewski's poem *Kino "Potęga"* ["Potęga" cinema] dedicated to Barbara and Wojciech Pszoniak (WZAG, 221; ZG, 142), or screenings remembered as almost religious<sup>91</sup> experiences, even if the repertoire was a compromise:

The screen at the "Potęga" cinema could take any film and any picture – Indians felt at home there, and the Soviet characters had nothing to complain about either.

[...]

It seems that on some Sundays

God was close.<sup>92</sup>

A memory of music proves to be translatable into film in *Dżungla* [Jungle] by Zagajewski (WWAZ, 325):

music alien and beautiful since the very beginning, like Greta Garbo  
in a spy film, among ordinary figures<sup>93</sup>

In another poem by the same author, *Anteny w deszczu* [Antennas in the rain], a perverse evaluation of a film's greatness (treated literally) appears: "Kino było tak małe, że film Bergmana z trudem się w nim mieścił" [The cinema was so small that Bergman's film could hardly fit] (WWAZ, 259–263), in *Serenada, szeptana do ucha przy wtórze szmeru klimatyzatora* [A serenade whispered in the ear to the tune of air conditioner's humming] by Barańczak (WZSB, 485–486; ZG 272–273) "w kinie / obejrzeni Wałkonie" [*I vitelloni* seen / at the cinema] are among discoveries which – as opposed to living with the beloved woman – one can get used to, and in *Podczas świąt*<sup>94</sup> [During Christmas] by Lipska (ZG, 140) a Christmas dinner involves not even Bergman or Fellini, but a classic melodrama by Michael Curtiz: I am watching *Casablanca* with my usual appetite for digression.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup>Dariusz Pawelec writes about Zagajewski and Kornhauser: The "Potęga" [Might] cinema was the common "happy place" of both poets, where "in spite of its name, the screening room was tight and narrow like an intestine, but the boys saw it as a space made of dream and imagination" (Dariusz Pawelec, "W poszukiwaniu 'świata nieogarnionych rzeczy'" ["In the search of "the world of unimaginable things świata", *Fabryka Silesia* 10, No 3 (2015): 103).

<sup>92</sup>Ekran w kinie "Potęga" gotów był przyjąć każdy film i każdy obraz – Indianie czuli się tu jak u siebie w domu, lecz sowieccy bohaterowie także nie mogli narzekać.

[...]

Wydaje się, że w niektóre niedziele

Bóg był blisko.

<sup>93</sup>Poprawa writes about Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* in the context of Barańczak (see Poprawa, "Mitologie Barańczaka" [Barańczak's mythologies]), however, also in the case of Zagajewski it is tempting to remind that Barthes (among other things) Barthes states that Garbo's face is an idea (Roland Barthes, "Garbo's face", in: Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Polish translation by Adam Dziadek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Aletheia, 2008), 99). muzyka od początku obca i piękna jak Greta Garbo w szpiegowskim filmie, wśród pospolitych figur.

<sup>94</sup>Ewa Lipska, "Podczas świąt" [During holidays], in: Ewa Lipska, *Sklepy zoologiczne* [Pet shops] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001), 15.

<sup>95</sup>Oglądam *Casablankę* z takim samym jak zawsze apetytem na dygresję.

Capturing this moment is bitter-sweet since the viewer admits that she is “playing with loneliness”<sup>96</sup>. In *Pamięciarnia* [Memory place] by Kornhauser (WZJK, 84), whose motto is “*I already don’t like you, for you are different*”, a love disappointment is presented as follows:

Heart, which I am holding on suspenders,  
indeed resembles a photograph  
of Doris Day, taking a bath  
in “Ixi” bath powder [...]

Laurel and Hardy are also back – accompanied by two other silent cinema stars: Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. In *Tablice rejestracyjne* [License plates] by Lipska<sup>97</sup>, an account of an imagined trip further and further into the past, seemingly carefree, but with a sense of threat, also contains the following vision:

We are feeling great. We can see the storm  
but we cannot hear it. Like in a silent film.

Chaplin. Laurel and Hardy. Keaton.  
We burst out laughing. Lucky beggars  
in between wars. [...]<sup>98</sup>

In the poetry of Generation ’68, film is also used to show the impossibility of preserving what belongs to the past. Chaplin appears in *Dom* [Home] by Kornhauser (WZJK, 31; ZG, 162) as “Charlie Chaplin with a knife in his chest”, which hyperbolizes a vision of a home which is “not what it used to be”<sup>99</sup>. As a “tragic comedian, comic tragedian”<sup>100</sup>, Chaplin fits such pictures – not only because the knife in his chest can be seen as an ultimate negation of the old, lost world. The “funniness” of references to Laurel and Hardy seems to be similarly ambiguous. However, in this case the tension from Chaplin’s films should be mentioned, when “he shows

<sup>96</sup>Lipska also refers to this film in an interview – as a metaphor of past loves one is over with: “Everyone has their own private *Casablanca*. Sometimes it is worth rewatching” (Ewa Lipska: “Nie ma we mnie rozpacz. Nigdy jej nie było. Łzy zostawiam sobie do podlewania kwiatów” [There is no despair in me. Never has been. I leave my tears for watering plants] [an interview by Dorota Wodecka], <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,152731,25052455,ewa-lipska-lzy-zostawiam-sobie-do-podlewania-kwiatow.html> (date of access: 7.01.2021)). Lipska also refers to the same film in her novel: “Here’s just ‘looking at you, kid’, do you remember, from *Casablanca*?” (Ewa Lipska, *Sefer* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009), 102).

<sup>97</sup>Ewa Lipska, “Tablice rejestracyjne”, [Registration plates] in: Ewa Lipska, *Czytnik linii papilarnych* [Fingerprints reader] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2015), 37.

<sup>98</sup>Czujemy się świetnie. Widzimy burzę  
ale jej nie słyszymy. Jak w niemych filmach.  
Chaplin. Laurel i Hardy. Keaton.  
Wybuchamy śmiechem. Szczęściarze  
pomiędzy wojnami. [...]

<sup>99</sup>This vision resembles a “performance” by Chaplin in an Anatol Stern’s poem quoted by Koschany, *Charlie Chaplin*, “And a bloodied knife falls down with a clink, / When he, a harbor in a storm, / Fights – for the right to dream” (quoted after Koschany, “Chaplin jako Charlie” [Chaplin as Charlie], 87). Here the surprising resemblance of depiction also with subsequent lines of Kornhauser’s text manifests itself: “Let’s sail, friends, the earth is reversed, / let’s sail towards something, always towards something”.

<sup>100</sup>Paweł Mościcki, *Chaplin. Przewidywanie teraźniejszości* [Chaplin. Predicting the present] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2017), 83.

this kind of fundamental disorganization of the world not only on the level of elementary physics, but also from the perspective of historical experience"<sup>101</sup>.

In the poem *Grażyna* by Zagajewski<sup>102</sup>, the name of a cinema in Gliwice is a symptom of a doomed-to-fail attempt at regaining Lviv, "changing / this city into that city"<sup>103</sup>. And in *Bełzec*<sup>104</sup> a film comparison:

What a beautiful day, surely berries in the wood  
are already as black as the lips of a *femme fatale* from a silent film<sup>105</sup>

is used to signal the pre-war past and to clash it with the cruelty committed later in Bełzec:

Berries are blacker and blacker.  
Shadows are black, hollowed.  
Burnt love is black.<sup>106</sup>

The subject of memories expressed through film does not have to lead to pleasant emotions, as shown by some of the above-mentioned examples, as well as the poem *Kino i coś jeszcze* [Cinema and something else] by Lipska<sup>107</sup> (ZG, 110). The title of the precursory debut by Luis Buñuel is used here metaphorically:

The beast of memories  
is jerking us  
like *An Andalusian Dog*  
in a New York movie house  
for one dollar<sup>108</sup>

This "beast" can be associated with wolves which "approached the house". Another element of horror can be associated with silent film: "a silent shadow was cast". This poem is about a constant threat, about the "decay of time", which "crushed history with a plot". As a side note,

<sup>101</sup>Mościcki, 143.

<sup>102</sup>Zagajewski, *Asymetria*, 23.

<sup>103</sup>See Anna Czabanowska-Wróbel, "Oddajcie mi moje dzieciństwo...". Pamięć i zapomnienie w twórczości Adama Zagajewskiego" ["Give me my childhood back...". Memory and oblivion in Zagajewski's works], in: Czabanowska-Wróbel, *Utopia powtórzenia* [Utopia of repetition], 278, 279.

<sup>104</sup>Adam Zagajewski, "Bełzec", in: Adam Zagajewski, *Prawdziwe życie* [Real life] (Kraków: a5, 2019), 63.

<sup>105</sup>Jaki piękny dzień, z pewnością jeżyny w lesie  
są już czarne jak usta amantek w niemym filmie

<sup>106</sup>Jeżyny są coraz czarniejsze.  
Czarne są cienie, wydrążone.  
Czarna jest miłość spalona.

<sup>107</sup>Ewa Lipska, "Kino i coś jeszcze" [Cinema and something more], in: Ewa Lipska, *Pamięć operacyjna* [Operational memory] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2017), 33–34.

<sup>108</sup>Bestia wspomnień  
wciąż szarpie nami  
jak *Pies andaluzyjski*  
w nowojorskim iluzjonie  
za jednego dolara.

it should be observed that the forthcoming transformations are expressed in a form which sounds like an ironic epilogue added by the poet to *Za szkłem* by Barańczak:

In a jar of cucumbers  
a cineplex was maturing<sup>109</sup>

## The not-last screening

The New Wave's reflection on popular culture is (rightly so) mostly associated with Barańczak, but Zagajewski also approaches this topic in his latest collection of essays:

And there is one more rich source of references which is crucial in poetry – mass culture. I think that the noble theologists do not have a big problem with that, as they can simply ignore it – or study it wearing gloves, so to say. Meanwhile, reading hundreds of poems printed in dozens of magazines makes us realize that John Lennon, Robert De Niro, Andy Warhol, Greta Garbo, and Marilyn Monroe appear there more often than Dante, Milton, Goethe or Mickiewicz [...] <sup>110</sup>.

The poetry of the Generation '68 is another proof that there is no point in distancing oneself from such references. And despite the rather impressive volume of the present text, it is merely a reconnaissance. Film-related poetry requires more attention and detailed analyses of its stylistic tropes. A more extensive list of poems and poets is needed, contexts – from prose<sup>111</sup>, essay writing, film studies – should be developed, and "New Wave film" should be compared to films of both older and newer poems, as well as those which escaped the generational poetics of contemporaries, such as Bohdan Zadura's poetry...

There is still much to do in terms of literary studies (theory, history of literature, interpretation). However, even the necessarily short review presented here shows the significance of the role sometimes played by film in New Wave poetry. Poetic cinema is not always associated with clearly stated attitudes, it sometimes complicates interpretations of poetic situations, but then it supplies pictures, scenes, figures, which all allow us to realize and sensualize issues related to politics, culture, love, existential anxiety, and (un)successful attempts at stopping disintegration. And to show a person in a slightly different way; a bit of Bogart and Cooper – and a bit of Laurel and Hardy.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>109</sup>W słoikach z ogórkami  
dojrzewało Multikino.

<sup>110</sup>Adam Zagajewski, "Odeszli wielcy poeci" [Great poets are gone], in: Adam Zagajewski, *Substancja nieuporządkowana* [Unstructured substance] (Kraków: Znak, 2019), 116–117.

<sup>111</sup>For example, Koschany notices the cinemacity of a part of *Żywa śmierć* (*Scenariusz z mojej wczesnej młodości. Wakacje*) [Living death. A scenario from my early youth] by Lipska (see Koschany, "Literackie filmy urojone", 66).

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# KEYWORDS

*film*

GENERATION '68

*poetry*

*metaphor*

**Julian Kornhauser**

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper presents the role of film in the poetry of Generation '68 – mostly by Stanisław Barańczak, but also Julian Kornhauser, Ewa Lipska, and Adam Zagajewski. The New Wave poets referred to actors (such as Humphrey Bogart, Gary Cooper, the duo Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Ali McGraw), characters, titles, scenes, as well as experiences and conclusions related to film genres from cinema and (less commonly) TV productions. It allowed to verbalize or even “translate” issues regarding ethical choices, the condition of a man lost in a clash with the world, (and often doomed to fail in that clash), evanescence, and attempts at escaping from its ruthless rules into sensual categories.



## ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

*Stanisław Barańczak*

## NEW WAVE

*E w a L i p s k a*

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# From Ekphrasis Rhetoric to Cinema Anthropology. Contemporary Film Poetry and “Telling Films”

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## Introductory remarks

The presence of cinema and film in Polish poetry has been intense since the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, although it should be noted that the fascination of interwar poets with this new art form was more avid back then, and also seemed to offer more interesting results, both in terms of form (in terms of the poetic language and extending its borders), and genealogy. For example, specific poetic genres emerged then, in which film and cinematicity dominat-

ed on special, strictly defined rules – such as conventionally journalistic poetic film reviews, *film raconté* (re-told films)<sup>1</sup>, cinematographic poems<sup>2</sup>, and film novels<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, contemporary references to cinema and film(s) are both numerous and dispersed. Generally speaking, there is a mutuality of a sort: film and cinema belong to everyday culture, and what follows – to both everyday and poetic language.

The titular “contemporaneity” is not a precisely defined period, but it allows one to chronologically define the relationship between the poetry of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and post-war poetry, including modern poetry. Apart from all the significant elements differentiating those two periods, there is also the problem of ekphrasis: if it was already present before, it was as a formal experiment, and later – with more awareness of the rhetorical load of the genre<sup>4</sup>.

In modern film poetry various “film subjects” are represented, attempts at “imitating” film have been undertaken (even if these were unintentional gestures testifying to a “cinematic” way of seeing and depicting), and finally cinema and film constitute – as is commonly known, even internalized “worlds” and association systems – the basis for *metaphors*, comparisons, analogies. “Everything is so cinematic here”, as Marta Berewska<sup>5</sup> writes in the poem *Do S. Wyspiańskiego* [To S. Wyspiański]. Regardless of various attempts at systematizing the unusually abundant material of contemporary film poetry, it is possible to distinguish a group of poems with *references to specific films*. They are not just embellishments, and they are not among the numerous simple references to the popular culture or intertextual allusions, nor are they bragging with erudition or an empty sign of *zeitgeist* (although there are also numerous examples of those) – they are different because they are attempts at a profound (poetic) insight into film pictures. Looking for theoretical inspirations in reflections on the presence of painting and music in literature, and especially in poetry, I am leaning towards a thesis that distinguishing certain characteristics selected for the analysis of a dozen or so poems allows to observe examples of ekphrases.

<sup>1</sup> See Grażyna Szymczyk-Kluszczyńska, “Opowiadam? Opisuję?” [Am I telling? Am I describing?] (Poeci-surrealiści wobec kina [Poets-surrealists and cinema]), w *Małe formy narracyjne* [Small narrative forms], edited by Eugenia Łoch (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> See Grażyna Szymczyk-Kluszczyńska and Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, “Poemat kinematograficzny. Analiza pewnego typu związków między literaturą a kinem” [Cinematographic poem. Analysis of a certain type of relationships between literature and cinema]. *Przegląd Humanistyczny* No 11 (1982).

<sup>3</sup> See Alina Madej, “Między filmem a literaturą. Szkic o powieści filmowej” [Between film and literature. A sketch on film novel], in *Film polski wobec innych sztuk* [Polish film and other arts], edited by Alicja Helman, Alina Madej (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1979); Janusz Kucharczyk, “Pierwiastki filmowe w twórczości literackiej Tadeusza Peipera i Jalu Kurka” [Film elements in the works by Tadeusz Peiper and Jalu Kurek]. *Kwartalnik Filmowy* nr 1 (1965).

<sup>4</sup> Hence the present text, also due to the limitations of space, I do not consider the interwar poetry – despite its many references to specific films. Film poetry of that period is a rather well-studied topic. See for example Ewa and Marek Pytasz, “Poetycka podróż w świat kinematografu, czyli kino w poezji polskiej lat 1914-1925” [A poetic journey into the world of cinematography – cinema in the Polish poetry from 1914-1925], in *Szkice z teorii filmu* [Sketches on film theory], edited by Alicja Helman, Tadeusz Miczka (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1978), 18-32; Wojciech Otto, *Literatura i film w kulturze polskiej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [Literature and film in the culture of the Polish interwar period] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Marta Berowska, “Do S. Wyspiańskiego”. *Poezja* No 7-8 (1985): 93.

## “Telling films” – cultural and theoretical contexts

In attempted answers to the question whether poetic ekphrasis in a film is at all possible, it is a good idea to refer to the association of “telling films”, which – as a seemingly everyday, common activity – is not often included in the history of cinema, which would also involve a number of cinema-related practices, rather than focus solely on films and their creators. However, leaving out the purely anecdotal layer of the issue, in which telling films for their “everyday” needs of the parties involved<sup>6</sup> was sometimes even a subject of jokes<sup>7</sup>, it is possible to look at this issue from a strictly historical and/or cultural, as well as – what I find especially interesting – theoretical perspective. Due to the variety of contexts preparing the ground for reflection on “proper” film ekphrasis, I will only address a handful of the most characteristic examples, accentuating the level of “translation” in all other cases, seeking or constructing an *ersatz* of a sort: a verbal “text” in terms of the (moving) film picture.

It seems that the oldest of the above-mentioned associations are related to the character (and profession) of *benshi* – a Japanese film-external narrator of silent film. *Benshi* not only read subtitles for the audience, but also what the character were saying (thus becoming an actor of a sort during screening) and they “interpreted” what the film was suggesting, often intentionally distorting the meaning of foreign films. According to scholars of this subject, “*Benshi* transformed the visual language of cinema into a verbal one, hence explaining the meaning of a film completely depended on their perspective”<sup>8</sup>. On the one hand, it is said that Japanese cinema was created and developed differently from its European or American counterparts, which is why *benshi* were so important for it, and on the other – that it was actually due to the huge role played by *benshi* that greatly contributed to the fact that Japanese cinema followed its own path for a longer time, especially in terms of constructing narration and introducing sound in the 1930s<sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, *benshi* – as an institution – has survived until today, and even Polish audiences recently had a chance to experience it<sup>10</sup> (it has survived as a continuation of the respectable art of storytelling, as well as a part of the trend of returning to unique practices sought in the times of the cultural globalization of practices, in the times of film’s common availability, and – most importantly – the fact that film remains the same during every screening).

<sup>6</sup> Today – quite paradoxically – those practices are continued in computer algorithms or programs available online, which “listen” to our story (typically reduced to key words) in order to suggest what film we mean, if we just remember something from it, but not the title. A similar function is served by dedicated Facebook groups.

<sup>7</sup> A cycle of radio sketches from 1970s, *Para-męt pikczers czyli kulisy srebrnego ekranu* [Paramount Pictures – the backstage of the silver screen], screenplay by Andrzej Zaorski. As Jędrsek, he talked with Maniek (Marian Kociniak) about a film they saw. Conventionally, each episode started with a line *I saw a cool movie yesterday...*

<sup>8</sup> Hiroshi Komatsu, Charles Musser, “Benshi Search”, quoted after Krzysztof Loska, “Benshi jako współautor filmu” [Benshi as a co-author of a film]. *Kwartalnik Filmowy* nr 59 (2007): 59.

<sup>9</sup> See Loska; Jeffrey Dym, *A Brief History of Benshi (Silent Film Narrators)*, [https://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/a\\_brief\\_history\\_of\\_benshi](https://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/content.cfm/a_brief_history_of_benshi); Dawid Głównia, *Początki kina w Japonii na tle przemian społeczno-politycznych kraju* [Beginnings of cinema in Japan and the socio-political transformations] (Wrocław: Atut, 2020).

In 1994, a Japanese-American film *Picture Bride* (Kayo Hatta), set at the beginning of the 20th century, about a marriage arranged based on photographs. In one scene set in the village where the young bride eventually ends up there is a travelling cinema. Film fight scenes between samurais are explained to the audience by a *benshi*. Interestingly, the role was played by a then 70-year-old Toshirō Mifune, the famous Japanese actor, best known from his previous roles (also of samurais) in films by, among others, Akira Kurosawa.

<sup>10</sup> An event organized at the Warsaw cinema, Elektronik (3-4.03.2017), during which three Japanese films were shown with Kataoka Ichirō, master storyteller of the story in question (earlier – in 2015 – he was also a guest of 12. Święta Niemego Kina [12. Celebration of Silent Film]).

Although the “institution” of *benshi* remains characteristic of and unique to Japanese cinema, as this is where it emerged and took shape, mostly due to different aesthetic traditions, especially theatrical terms; there is no doubt that similar “storytellers” were also needed elsewhere, especially in the silent film era. The major reason for this was the fact that illiteracy was common – viewers could not read the cards with “stage directions” and dialogues. The second biggest problem was that audiences were not prepared to receive film – as a form of art relying on specific means of narration, and devoted to a world which was often completely alien to viewers. This is evidenced by the Łódź novel *Ulica* [Street] by Jisroel Rabon, set in the 1920s. The protagonist works at the Wenus cinema and gives an account of his first performance: “I spoke loudly, with fire and passion. The room was quiet. The audience was listening to my words in awe. [...] When the first act was over and the light was back on, the audience gave me an ovation yelling ‘long live the reader!’”<sup>11</sup>.

On the one hand, the previously-mentioned practice of telling films creates a slightly different context for reflection on the intersemiotic translation of an audiovisual work, while on the other, there is its culturally-conditioned tradition. In his short novel with the telling title *The Movie Speaker*, Hernán Rivera Letelier explores precisely this topic. The story is set in the 1960s in a small Chilean village, where most people work in a saltpeter mine. Among the few available forms of entertainment there is a cinema, however, few can afford it. Due to poverty and the father’s disability, one family (a single father of four sons and one daughter, the youngest, María Margarita) comes up with the idea of sending one child to the cinema, so that he or she can tell the film to the rest. He even organizes a special contest, in which the girl wins, unmatched, “the best movie speaker in the family”<sup>12</sup>, who retells the onscreen story with unusual suggestiveness, together with a detailed account of the background of events, and becoming increasingly more professional in terms of acting out individual characters – all the while using her unlimited imagination, and even gossip or suggestions from such things as film stills. “When I tell a film – being generous with gestures and voice modulation – I transform into each of the characters. That evening I was Ben-Hur, Messala – a dark character – and both lepers healed by Jesus. I was even Jesus himself”<sup>13</sup>. It should also be stressed that the narrator herself appreciates the significance of her training (of a sort) for becoming her family’s film teller (and not just that, for with time a cultural institution of a sort develops, which even competes with cinema) – her mother telling her bedtime stories. What is interesting for me here is the very fact of suggestive narration and the need to listen to it. However, in broader terms, we cannot forget that Letelier’s story is in a way representative of certain contexts of the development of receptive cinematic practices. It also highlights the significance of orally transmitted stories in the life of individuals and societies, including their role in the shaping and inspiring the imagination of listeners.

The formula of *told cinema* (in Belarusian *izustnoje kino*) is a relatively new phenomenon with its own specific history (i.e. not found in other accounts, however, due to the fact that it also has its own genealogy – analogical or similar enterprises must have appeared elsewhere). In the 1980s in Belarus there was an intensification of activity of various artistic *avant-gardes*, including the group Belarusian Climate – a multidisciplinary formation which also included “told cinema”. Of course

<sup>11</sup>See Izrael Rabon, *Ulica*, translated by Krzysztof Modelski (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1991), 117.

<sup>12</sup>Hernán Rivera Letelier, *Opowiadaczka filmów*, translated by Natalia Nagler (Warszawa: Muza, 2012), 12.

<sup>13</sup>Letelier, 31.

the broader context was important here, including the fledgeling market for video players and VHS tapes: renting films, exchanging them, *ad hoc* home cinemas, as well as talking about these films and telling films. However, the told cinema produced by Belarusian Climate was a fully autonomous form of expression, located between oral literature and performance: here a told film was “invented” (i.e. it did not have a prototype), together with the whole plot, and even genre (even music is told in it) – as opposed to the rather imitative (apart from the question of talent and the individual author’s ambitions) character of the performances of the “film teller” from Letelier’s book and other similar “tellers”. Alena Siutsova wrote an M.A. thesis on the niche and the unique phenomenon of told cinema<sup>14</sup>. In her attempt at presenting the broad, theoretical characteristics of the genre, she also refers to ekphrasis – of course with a reservation that *de facto* what is being described, the original, is missing. However, what is equally important (both in ekphrasis and told cinema) is achieving a similar effect in the addressee and their imagination (a mental picture / moving pictures). Although it would be equally interesting to refer to the tradition of hypotyposis (defined as a vivid, picturesque description of scenes or events, so suggestive that it is able to create an adequate equivalent in the listener’s or reader’s imagination, not necessarily referring to an existing work of art), it is still a fact that told cinema is an interesting example of a practice which could be defined as an attempt at achieving a cinematic effect – without its direct participation, but including all the transformations it has achieved in the ways of perceiving, imagining, and finally – telling it.

The last one, *audiodescription*, also brings us closer to intersemiotic considerations on ekphrasis. This is not new – in fact, it remains very topical today, being put into practice and subjected to theoretical considerations more and more intensely. It allows a confrontation of two types of description: film and fine arts (audiodescription – also in the institutional context – first appeared in modern museum practices, later followed by cinema and TV). It should be stressed that the tradition of audiodescription (typically that related to the fine arts) is often connected to the theory of ekphrasis<sup>15</sup>. In the understanding of film audiodescription as a “tool”, a functionality of sort, which is supposed to play a given role in mediating a “cinematic” message to visually impaired audiences, the “target text” does not aspire to be a form of art. However, at the same time, researchers of that topic raise the issue of the quality of such a “text”; there is no doubt that the reception of a film via its linguistic translation largely depends on – precisely – the type of narration. It can be said that in this sense the practice of audiodescription brings together all of the above-mentioned experiences and traditions. Magdalena Urbańska refers to the views and activity of Hannah J. Thompson, which is about showing appreciation for audiodescription, considering it a form of activity which could even be awarded during film festivals (which is already taking place)<sup>16</sup>. The very reflection on the possibility of finding an equivalent between a moving picture and its linguistic description shows clearly what the problem and the art of poetic ekphrasis might be. In this analogy, a visually impaired listener becomes the best – if one can say that – addressee of a “told film” – the quality of narration will translate directly into the quality of the mental picture.

<sup>14</sup>See Alena Siutsova, “Kino opowiadane. Historia i teoria” [Told cinema. History and theory] (M.A. thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2014).

<sup>15</sup>See Robert Więckowski, “Audiodeskrypcja piękna” [Audiodescription of beauty]. *Przekładaniec* No 28 (2014); Beata Jerzakowska, “Ekfrazja poetycka w audiodeskrypcji” [Poetic ekphrasis in audiodescription]. *Polonistyka* nr 5 (2013).

<sup>16</sup>See Magdalena Urbańska, “Głos filmu: o audiodeskrypcjach” [Cinema’s voice: on audiodescription]. *Ekrany* No 4 (2020): 117; Hannah Thompson, “Audio Description: Turning Access to Film into Cinema Art”. *Disability Studies Quarterly* 38, nr 3 (2018), <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6487/5085>.

## Film poetry – towards ekphrasis

The attempts at classifying the material of film poetry presented above can be constructed around three sub-genological criteria: thematic, formal, and metaphorical. It is not always possible to clearly separate them from one another – which also refers to ekphrases. For, on the one hand, we are dealing with a clear subject reference: to a specific film, its title, and particular elements. However, on the other hand, if such poems are initially classified as ekphrases, they will also contain attempts at a linguistic expression of film constituents as a work of art, which eventually lead to the writing of a poem. And so from a formal perspective, in such cases issues of intersemiotic translation, formal mimesis, or imitation as a certain tendency, in art which tries to go beyond its own material, or make it “softer”<sup>17</sup> (semiotic theory of ekphrasis), should also be included.

From a purely “thematic” perspective, when a given film seems to be the leading or secondary character in a poem, it is possible to distinguish several variants of such transmedia references and characterize the collected material in different ways. Ekphrasis (discussed separately) is obviously the access point here, understood as “literature moving towards film”<sup>18</sup>, but it is worth characterizing the way itself in the search for it.

A large group of poems in which film titles appear are constituted by incidental *references* to them – contextual, pretextual, or purely “formal”, as specific events which are merely a background or signal for a lyrical situation. For example, in the poem *Mógłbym* [I could], Zbigniew Machaj refers to the 1983 Federico Fellini film:

I could describe, at least in a few poems,  
what you were doing when you were at the cinema with me  
when you got bored with the film *And the Ship Sails On*<sup>19</sup>.

Any kind of intertextual games and irony in which specific films are signs of collective imagination, as well as of film awareness of the authors who can in fact use them as well-digested cultural texts, also belong here. *Casablanca*<sup>20</sup> by Marcin Świetlicki would be a good example. The poem (regardless of its title) mixes motifs and the characters of “an elderly man who disturbingly resembles Bogart”, and “a seventy-year-old Marilyn Monroe”.

<sup>17</sup>See Erazm Kuźma, “Granice porównywalności poezji z malarstwem i filmem” [Limits of comparability of poetry with painting and film], in *Pogranicza i korespondencje sztuk* [Art borderlines and correspondences], edited by Teresa Cieślukowska, Janusz Sławiński (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1980), 267.

<sup>18</sup>This is how Jerzy Kossak characterized early works by Pier Paolo Pasolini, referring to the title of one of the essays by the director himself, and – what should be remembered – the semiotics of film. *Scenariusz jako “struktura, która chce być inną strukturą”* [Screenplay as “a structure which wants to be a different structure”], see Jerzy Kossak, *Kino Pasoliniego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1976), 16.

<sup>19</sup>Zbigniew Machaj, “Mógłbym”, in *Dwa zbiory wierszy* [Two books of poetry] (Londyn: Puls Publications, 1990), 82. *Mógłbym opisać, choćby w paru wierszach, co wyprawiałaś będąc ze mną w kinie kiedy cię znudził film “A statek płynie”*

<sup>20</sup>Marcin Świetlicki, “Casablanca”, in *37 wierszy o wódce i papierosach* [37 poems about vodka and cigarettes] (Bydgoszcz: Instytut Wydawniczy Świadectwo, 1996), 25.

Poetic texts whose titles lead the reader to specific film tropes, but whose text does not provide a simple continuation of the association, deserve to be mentioned here as well. These are suggestions which – according to the rule of attribution to famous films and surely intentional gestures of the authors – set off a system of associations with the story they are telling, such as in the poem *Złodzieje rowerów* [Bike thieves] by Roman Bąk<sup>21</sup>. The title clearly opens a relationship with Vittorio de Sica's 1948 film, although the story itself does not resemble the film. However, the similarity of contexts is noticeable: an unemployed father, his little boy, hunger, and staggering poverty which determines their existence:

son, I don't have money for bread,  
I don't have enough for eternal bread  
your clothes are torn  
under the brightest of skies  
[...] <sup>22</sup>

A similar characteristic can be noted in reference to *Ballada o Narayamie*<sup>23</sup> [Ballad on Narayama] by Krzysztof Lisowski: on the one hand, it is a reference to the 1958 Keisuke Knoshita film and the main motif of the story it tells; on the other – it is a universal existential project, which contains a journey (literal or metaphorical) towards death.

we have to leave unnoticed  
home  
body  
[...]  
without looking back  
pass by wilderness cross streams  
meet God on the Mountain top<sup>24</sup>

Grzegorz Olszański offers a broad spectrum of references in his *Kroniki filmowe*<sup>25</sup> [News-reels]. Each of the 36 poems in the book has a title which is identical with some more or less known films (the list of contents contains the last names of directors, which is interesting in itself), and there is no doubt that individual texts were written “under the influence”

<sup>21</sup>Roman Bąk, “Złodzieje rowerów”, in *Ulica, gdzie sprzedają zapałki* [The street where matches fall] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo “W drodze”, 1985), 25.

<sup>22</sup>nie mam już synku na chleb  
na wieczny chleb mi zabrakło  
rwie się twoje ubranko  
pod najjaśniejszym z nieb

<sup>23</sup>Krzysztof Lisowski, “Ballada o Narayamie”, in *Ciemna dolina* [Dark valley] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Śląsk, 1986), 65-66.

<sup>24</sup>trzeba wyjść niepostrzeżenie  
z domu  
ciała  
[...]  
ale nie patrzeć za siebie  
mijać bezdroża przekraczać strumienie  
na Górze spotkać się z Bogiem

<sup>25</sup>Grzegorz Olszański, *Kroniki filmowe* (Warszawa: Lampa i Iskra Boża, 2006).



of the films they refer to. Both the whole book of poems, and individual, various accounts which take place between films suggested in titles and the text, would actually deserve a separate paper, especially given that in some poems additional, less obvious and open intertextual references can be found. For example, there are cryptoquotations from other films in the poem *Mondo Cane* (in Polish, the film was also known as *Dogs' world*): “a dog’s afternoon and a man who bit a dog”<sup>26</sup>. (I will refer to another example from the same book of poems later in the text)

A separate group of reviews does not present “proper” ekphrases due to their clearly judgmental tone, rather than a merely descriptive one, characteristic of ekphrasis. This group also has quite a different character from the already mentioned interwar poetic film reviews, which are full of awe and exultation, and written from the perspective of an emotionally engaged viewer, impressionistic and typically focused on attractions related to the very phenomenon of cinema as an art of moving pictures, technological advancements and unattainable film stars, who are to be loved without any limits. Modern examples are more critical, deconstructionist, and often ironic. For example, the attitude of the protagonist of a collage poem *Non-stop-show* by Tadeusz Różewicz can be read like this. In the poem, there is a passage on *Lolita* by Stanley Kubrick (1962) (according to the rule of combining passages of texts, quotations, subtitles, in a different place in the poem there is also an excerpt from a genuine [?] newspaper review of the film):

[...] I saw *Lolita* in Munich  
*Lolita* That *Lolita* is a very long  
 film with a perfect actor who is bad  
 in that film *lolita* is like an icicle  
 a gitl with no armpit hair  
 like a doll On decent or something like that  
*Lolita* cruel naked hairless doll  
 here and there that wooden saw that boring  
 melodrama has been screened for months in the biggest  
 cinema of Munich Royal-Theater<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Grzegorz Olszański, *Mondo Cane*, in: Olszański, *Kroniki filmowe*, 43. The line quoted here is a contamination of titles of films by Sidney Lumet, *Mondo Cane* (1975) and *Man Bites Dog* (1992), authored by three directors: André Bonzel, Benoît Poelvoorde and Rémy Belvaux (the Polish title is modeled after the English version, not the original *C'est arrivé près de chez vous*).

<sup>27</sup>Tadeusz Różewicz, “Non-stop-show”, in *Utwory zebrane. Poezja*, t. 2 [Collected works. Poetry, vol. 2] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2006), 407-408; from the volume *Twarz trzecia* [Third face] (1968).

[...] *Lolitę* widziałem w Monachium  
*Lolita* Ta *lolita* to bardzo nudny długi  
 film z doskonałym aktorem który jest zły  
 w tym filmie *lolita* to taki sopelek  
 lodu dziewczynka bez zarostu pod pachami  
 jak laleczka On decent czy coś w tym rodzaju  
*Lolita* okrutna naga laleczka bez włosów  
 tu i tam ta drewniana piła ten nudny  
 melodramat idzie od miesięcy w największym  
 kinie Monachium Royal-Theater

In *Streszczając niezaznajomionym „Przeminęło z wiatrem”*<sup>28</sup> [Providing a recap of *Gone with the Wind* for those who haven't seen it], Marta Podgórnica adopts a similarly ironic (at least initially) attitude, with a clear distance (both temporal and emotional) to the classic film novel. The very formula of the title directs the reader towards “telling a film”, and eventually while giving an account of Scarlett O'Hara's life irony turns into empathy, and the narrative about film events unnoticeably transfers to the world of both the “teller” and the readers:

Ashley, in spite of his most honest intentions, could not marry miss O'Hara.  
 Ashley married miss Hamilton due to them having common interests.  
 Scarlett married Charles out of spite, who – luckily soon died in a war.  
 Scarlett could not predict how much her next relationship was about to change her life –  
 [...]
 First she loses her child, then love.

*I'll think about it tomorrow, this is what she tells herself*  
 First your heart breaks, than that thin floor  
*I'll think, she thinks, about other stained glass*

I would consider other, different intertextual and intersemiotic relations to poetic *travesties* or film *updates*. *W środek miasta*<sup>29</sup> [In the City Center] by Jerzy Harasymowicz, about an incipit, does not suggest anything in the title; the poem starts with a universal parable about a man a woman (from the perspective of the former), about their life together. It is only during the narration when the following lines appear: “She believed I did miracles / the mythical Zampanò / breaks horseshoes / (plywood) / in the clouds”, which is a direct reference to *La Strada* by Federico Fellini (1954); to some degree the sad story from the poem is a variation of the film story, though contemporary and rooted in a different context (“She was pushing the strolley / of Cracow's poverty”).

<sup>28</sup>Marta Podgórnica, “Streszczając niezaznajomionym «Przeminęło z wiatrem»”, in *Zawrót głowy. Antologia polskich wierszy filmowych* [Dizziness. An anthology of Polish film poems], edited by Darek Foks (Łódź: Narodowe Centrum Kultury Filmowej, 2018), 278 (from the volume *Dwa do jeden* [Two to one], 2006).

Ashley, pomimo najszczerzych intencji, nie mógł ożenić się z panną O'Hara.  
 Ashley ożenił się z panną Hamilton, ze względu na pokrewne zainteresowania.  
 Scarlett ze złości wyszła za Karola, który – na szczęście, zginął na wojnie.  
 Scarlett nie mogła przewidzieć, jak bardzo zmieni jej życie kolejny związek –  
 [...]

Najpierw utraci dziecko, potem straci miłość.  
 Pomyślę o tym jutro, tak sobie powtarza.  
 Najpierw pęka ci serce, potem ta krawiec.  
 Pomyślę, myśli, o innych witrażach.

<sup>29</sup>Jerzy Harasymowicz, “W środek miasta”, in *Od Staffa do Wojaczka. Poezja polska 1939-1985. Antologia* [From Staff to Wojaczka. Polish poetry 1939-1985], edited by Bohdan Drozdowski, Bohdan Urbankowski (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1988), vol. 2, 244-245 (from the volume *Kłękajcie narody* [Kneel down, nations], 1984).

Thus the famous film story is treated as a specific matrix – in this case – for a love story, and applied to “its own” story. Maciej Woźniak does something similar in *Bonnie i Clyde*<sup>30</sup>. This time thanks to the titular clue the reader has no doubt that the dialogue between lovers refers to a specific film (Arthur Penn, 1967), the story it tells, and the way it is presented (the manhunt scene in which the protagonists die is now famous because of the masterful camerawork and montage):

[...]

I wanted (we were young and we thought: if it hurts, that's nothing)  
them to shoot us with four cameras, as we are under gunfire,  
with good montage it will look as if we were dancing.

I wanted us to lie in blood,  
and for others to read the final credits, not us

In an attempt at using the film matrix for telling “one’s own” story, what Woźniak does is so suggestive, that actually – but for the mediation (“I wanted”) – the poem would be very close to ekphrasis.

## Ekphrasis and its “viewer”

In literary studies, in terms of ekphrasis, there is a common reference point: a rhetorical tradition of (literary) description, and even “a detailed description” of a work of art, typically a painting, sculpture, or architecture. In terms of the constituents of such a poetic genre, Adam Dziadek lists metalinguistic indicators (title, painter’s last name, etc.), and “elements of a description of a work of art placed inside a literary text”<sup>31</sup> (contexts of the described work of art, its genre characteristics, characteristic motifs in the works by a given artist, etc.). For the purpose of this paper, I would also distinguish and accentuate three important issues. Firstly, modern research into ekphrasis is predominantly focused on the very language of description: its possibilities, rhetorical limitations, its persuasive power<sup>32</sup>. After all, James A.W. Heffernan defines ekphrasis in a condensed way, as a verbal reflection of a visual

<sup>30</sup>Maciej Woźniak, “Bonnie i Clyde”, in *Zawrót głowy. Antologia polskich wierszy filmowych*, 280-281 (which provides information on the source [*Iluzjon* [Movie theater], 2008], podczas gdy pochodzi on z tomu *Wszystko jest cudze* [2005]). Chciałam (byliśmy młodzi i myśleliśmy: to nic, kiedy boli) żeby kręcili z czterech kamer, jak do nas strzelają, po dobrym montażu będzie wyglądało, jakbyśmy tańczyli. Chciałem, żebyśmy leżeli cali we krwi, i żeby to inni, nie my, musieli czytać końcowe napisy.

<sup>31</sup>See Adam Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej* [Picture and poems. On the interefence of arts in the modern Polish poetry] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 55.

<sup>32</sup>See Dziadek, 53; Michał Paweł Markowski, “Ekphrasis. Uwagi bibliograficzne z dołączeniem krótkiego komentarza” [Ekphrasis. Bibliographical notes with a short comment]. *Pamiętnik Literacki* XC, z. 2 (1999).

image<sup>33</sup>. Secondly, ekphrasis is not really about faithfulness or “responsibility” understood in any other way – ekphrasis is an interpretation, not a reproduction. In this sense the perspective of the teller is crucial in its definition: “Ekphrasis describes a work of art, but not only that – it also describes the person who is admiring it”<sup>34</sup>. Thirdly, one “problem” of ekphrasis is also the very fact of reception: a collection of intellectual, sensual processes, and especially those which affect the reader’s or listener’s of a poetic “film teller’s” imagination. However, the key question whether there is such a thing as film ekphrasis, and how it exists, will be answered after analyzing a few examples.

Under the title of her poem *Ruchome piaski*<sup>35</sup> [Quicksand], Krystyna Rodowska places a decisive piece of information: (“inspired by *Woman in the Dunes*”). It is a specific clue, without which the reader would not recognize the source of that inspiration, and would not even know that there was any. This comment should moreover be treated as a *quasi-genre* qualification, which talks about an artistic way (from a film to a poem), about a specific transmedia relation (the film *Woman in the Dunes* vs. the poem), and finally about the honesty of the adopted perspective: the subtitle in brackets makes the character of a “film story” precise and specific. Of course, as has already been noted, even in the case of a restrictive focus on defining poetic film ekphrasis, seeking some plot contiguity or adequacy is out of the question. In most cases – according to the definition of ekphrasis – the poet makes a choice, looks and writes through a given prism, typically referring to a memory, an event and the afterimages it stores. It seems that in Rodowska’s poem – instead of “film telling” there is a record of a condensation of meanings (the story from *Woman in the Dunes* as a parable of existence, the process of self-cognition and the possibility of living in a relation with the Other and in society), and characteristic formal determinants (such as a focus on texture: sand, water, the human body):

Buried return to what is the closest  
 Their hearing is a result of pouring sand  
 In the transparent hourglasses of bodies

<sup>33</sup>Danuta Mirka, “Czy istnieje muzyczna Ekphrasis?” [Is there musical ekphrasis?]. *Ruch Muzyczny* No 18 (2001): 35.

<sup>34</sup>Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej*, 72.

<sup>35</sup>Krystyna Rodowska, “Ruchome piaski”, in *Nic prócz O. Wiersze z lat 1968-2018* [Nothing but O. 1968-2018 poems] (Warszawa: PIW, 2019), 19 (from the volume *Gesty na śniegu* [Gestures on the snow], 1968).

Zasypani powracają do tego co najbliższe  
 Ich słuch jest wynikiem przesypania się piasku  
 w przezroczystych klepsydrach ciał  
 Miarka piasku, miarka losu  
 Ich źrenice są otwarte i czarne  
 jak obojętność wody pozostałej na dnie  
 W języku silnych tutaj: pij zabij!  
 Po sznurowanej drabince wyobraźni  
 wspina się z dołu tylko śmiech  
 W ich słonej skórze są powiększone ziarna  
 wszystkich tajemnic  
 ławice snu przejęte koralowym dreszczem  
 wilgotne pnie dotyku z bolesnym nacięciem  
 Nad głową ptak się waży jeszcze nienazwany  
 Zasypani powracają do tego co najdalsze  
 bo nie wiedzą że piekłem jest właśnie ucieczka

A measure of sand, a measure of life  
 Their pupils are open and black  
 like the indifference of water lest at the bottom  
 In the language of the strong ones here: drink kill!  
 Only laughter climbs up  
 a rope ladder of imagination

In their salty skin there are augmented grains  
 of all mysteries  
 shoals of dream shivering with corals  
 moist trunks of touch with a painful cut

Above a bird is flying, not yet named  
 Those buried return to what is the furthest  
 because they do not see that escape is hell

In the poem *Filmowa Skandynawia (Harriet Anderson)*<sup>36</sup> [Film Scandinavia], Andrzej Kuśniewicz takes a different perspective. Both the name of an actress, and the conglomerate of motifs, associations, or plot details (circus troupe, journey, subsequent camps, Skagen, epidemic) lead to a conviction that the world presented in the poem is also – probably – a conglomerate of films. One will definitely be *Sawdust and Tinsel*, a 1953 film by Bergman (starring Anderson), and among the others – references to other examples of “film Scandinavia”, not necessarily Bergman’s:

Heralds at the gates

Epidemic in Skagen  
 Skagen is in a lockdown

<sup>36</sup>Andrzej Kuśniewicz, “Filmowa Skandynawia (Harriet Anderson)”, in *Czas prywatny* [Private time] (Warszawa: PIW, 1962), 11-12.

Heroldy u bram  
 Zaraza w Skagen  
 Skagen zamknięte  
 Od nocy podkowiło  
 Łazarz  
 z deską na oczach  
 białokonnym morzem  
 w mróz  
 Aż do ostatnich godzin płynął  
 nad wędrowcami namiot w chmurze  
 Zachodziło w pożar gdy mówiła:  
 – jestem silniejsza od ciebie  
 zginam podkowy  
 ujeżdżam znarowione konie  
 moje uda – gdy nimi –  
 to najmocniejszy ogier  
 – popróbuj!  
 W żółtych płachtach  
 godziny zasłonięte  
 Skagen nocą milczące  
 Skagen na łańcuch zamknięte

Horseshoes from the night

Lazarus

with a wooden plate on his eyes  
on a white horse of the sea  
into the frost

Until the final hours a tent  
swam over travellers on a cloud

It was turning into a fire when she said:

–I am stronger than you  
I bend horseshoes  
I break in frisky horses  
my ties – when with them –  
are the strongest stallion  
– try!

Hours covered  
in yellow sheets

Skagen, silent at night  
Skagen locked with a chain

Bohdan Zadura in *Siódma pieczęć*<sup>37</sup> [The Seventh Seal] uses the title to refer the reader to a very characteristic, inimitable imaginarium of Bergman's 1957 film: it is specific characters ("they see lumberjack knight and devil in their dreams"), props and motifs, but also an attempt at summoning the raw, dark, disturbing atmosphere of the represented world of the film, together with the key conviction regarding the death as the inevitable:

<sup>37</sup>Bohdan Zadura, *Siódma pieczęć*, in *W krajobrazie z amfor* [In the landscape of amphoras] (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968), 29.

kiedyśmy wielkie siadają na wzgórzach  
siedem lichtarzy niby słońce świeci  
do snu się kładą zwierzęta i dzieci  
po nieskończonych znużone podróżach  
w snach widzą drwala rycerza i diabła  
i widzą tabun uskrzydłonych koni  
i w śnie dopada ich tętent pogoni –  
ostatnia gwiazda do otchłani spadła  
drzewo się zwali dosięgnie nas kamień  
echo nas zwiedzie które schwycić trudno  
po drodze może napotkamy zamek  
i jak zwierzęta ruszamy na północ  
zamek odpływa i odpływa góra  
i śmierć jak jastrząb dopada nas w chmurach

when huge moths sit on hills  
 seven candelabums shine like the sun  
 children and animals are going to sleep  
 tired after endless journeys

they lumberjack knight and devil in their dreams  
 and a horde of winged horses  
 and they hear the hoofbeat of a chase—  
 the last star has fallen into the abyss

a tree will fall down a stone will reach us  
 echo will deceive us, which is difficult to capture  
 maybe we will come across a castle on our way

and like animals we will set off for the north  
 the castles floats away, and the mountain floats away  
 and death like a falcon catches us in the clouds

Kazimierz Hoffman sends a signal of a different kind – his poem is entitled *Kurosawa*<sup>38</sup>. However, it is unclear how legible this is for the reader. Perhaps Macbeth will be enough to recognize *Throne of Blood* by the Japanese director (1957); however, the equivalence of a picture from the film proves to be equally suggestive:

And then the forest approaches and everything like Macbeth  
 crackles shivers lightly in needles and leaves until  
 the wind blows away the red flames from the sky  
 and stops

The previously mentioned book of poems by Grzegorz Olszański *Kroniki filmowe* offers plenty of interpretation possibilities, as well as examples of “proper” ekphrases (leaving out all the remaining “ekphrasis-like” attempts – actually, the whole book). The poem *Ziemia i popioły* [Earth and Ashes] (title of the 2004 Atiq Rahimi film) is an especially interesting text, in which the problem of verbalization of the visual is thematized. Hence the cultural practice and theoretical problem of “film telling” are additionally highlighted:

1.  
 Wide shot, short cuts, sudden close-up's.  
 A story told with pictures, plot torn with sound,  
  
 word by word, frame by frame.

<sup>38</sup>Kazimierz Hoffman, “Kurosawa”, in *Trwająca chwila* [The ongoing moment] (Bydgoszcz: Ośrodek Kultury Regionalnej, 1991), 31.

A potem las podchodzi blisko i wszystko jak Makbet  
 trzeszczy dygocze drobno w igłach i w listkach dopóki  
 czerwieni rudej płomieni z nieba nie zdmuchnie wiatr  
 i nie ustanie

2.

An old man and a boy are walking slowly on the cinema screen.  
Behind them there is a burnt village and memory larded with land mines  
of oblivion  
Which is tempted by nothing. Nothing is domesticated

by this something, which is impossible to name.

3.

Words which are close to their expiration date in  
the background (nonsense, sense, dream). Paper language swallows  
subsequent letters. Three letters are already missing from the alphabet

s.o.s.<sup>39</sup>

Karol Maliszewski accurately comments on Olszański's "method", at the same time formulating one possible definition of film ekphrasis: "It is really not about telling someone about the contents of the films one has experienced. It is more about looking for equivalents. Looking for a short, brilliant, ambiguous lexical construction, which would be an equivalent of a film experience, cumulating in it the imagery and emotionality, and, at the end, put down with an intellectual riposte of an aphoristical character"<sup>40</sup>.

In order to summarize this thread it should be stressed that poetic ekphrasis in a film is possible, even if we assume that the restrictive rules of rhetoric do not allow to discuss its full realizations. As Adam Dziadek put it (in the context of plastic ekphrases): "Typically those works only partially meet the criteria of ekphrasis, and it would be better to talk about their *ekphrasisticity* or their *ekphrasistic character*"<sup>41</sup>. Also in reference to film ekphrases the "nature" of language seems to be an unsolvable problem; it has difficulties and sometimes is even unable to fully reflect what is non-linguistic, the *stricte* film-related: the audiovisual, evanescent, impossible to "cite". The different statuses of works which are in an ontological

<sup>39</sup>1.

Szeroki plan, krótkie cięcia, nagle zbliżenia.  
Historia opowiadana obrazami, fabuła poszarpana dźwiękiem,  
słowo po słowie, klatka po klatce.

2.

Stary mężczyzna i chłopiec idą wolno przez kinowy ekran.  
Za nimi spalona wioska i pamięć naszpikowana minami  
zapomnienia.

Co daje się uwieść przez nic. Nic daje się oswoić  
temu czemuś, czego nie sposób nazwać.

3.

Na trzecim planie słowa, którym kończy się termin  
ważności (bezsens, sens, sen). Papierowy język połyka  
kolejne litery. W alfabecie brakuje już

s.o.s.

<sup>40</sup>Karol Maliszewski, "Poeta już nie musi na Judahu skale" [The poet no longer has to on Judahu rock] *Po debiucie. Dziennik krytyka* [Following the debut. A critic's journal] (Wrocław: Biuro Literackie, 2008), 121.

<sup>41</sup>Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej*, 55; emphasis mine, RK.



dialogue with each other – a poetic text and a film – make “complementarity” impossible, hence the ekphrases discussed here are typically focused on selected, special elements: a film fragment, an individual frame, a scene, as well as on the captured dominant: atmosphere, mood, color. There is no doubt that all those poems, apart from being about film, are also about something else – what should be extracted in the process of interpretation, however, one issue – already suggested in a quote from Maliszewski – demands an independent completion.

The vast majority of ekphrases cited above (or film poems of an ekphrasistic character) were inspired by specific films. Hence, it turns out that the layer of cinema experience is also important: it is this picture that proved to be strong enough to make someone record it in a poem. The effort of a poetic description is directed not only towards a given film, but also its reception, experience, the screening itself. In Horace’s formula *ut pictura poesis* there is no direct mention of the translation process (of one work into another) – it is a comparison of the receptive situation which – to some extent – may bring a similar effect. It is in this “how” where I am looking for receptive attitudes, experiences, aesthetic experiences, impressions, which a film creates – and those are typically comparable due to their non-linguistic character. In the already cited *Kurosawa* by Kazimierz Hoffman, the description of an approaching army wearing a forest camouflage (a film scene) sets off a viewer’s perspective, who is left with a highly suggestive scene and a sudden end of the film:

But the tension will hold for a long time  
the heart is still racing and birds are drawing black initials  
in one flash<sup>42</sup>

The poems by Stanisław Grochowiak “*Joanna D’Arc*” *Dreyera*<sup>43</sup> [Dreyer’s “Joan of Arc”] and *Męczeństwo Joanny wg Dreyera*<sup>44</sup> [Dreyer’s The Passion of Joanne of Arc] are especially interesting examples of ekphrasis characterized in such a way, both thematizing the same act of reception of the 1928 silent film. The former compares two “reception styles”: academic (“I won’t be brought back to life by a scream from the last row / ‘Take a good look, gentleman, at the mole on the bishop’s lips’”), and individualized, within which the power of experience wins over the temptation of a cold vivisection (“I am shivering hit with an arrow / of common ugliness and Falconetti flour”). The latter, slightly later poem is also devoted to the intense cinematic experience rather than the film itself (darkness “Sits on the heart and scratches with its paws”) and – once the film is over – the confrontation with the awareness of the illusion in which the viewer has just participated:

<sup>42</sup> Ale napięcie trwać będzie jeszcze przez długi czas  
serce wciąż spieszy i ptaki kreślą czarne inicjały  
jednym błyskiem.

<sup>43</sup> Stanisław Grochowiak, “«Joanna D’Arc» Dreyera”, in *Wiersze nieznane i rozproszone* [Poems unknown and dispersed] (Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 1996), 87 (poem dated to 1954-1956).

<sup>44</sup> Stanisław Grochowiak, “Męczeństwo Joanny wg Dreyera”, in *Wiersze nieznane i rozproszone*, 138 (poem dated to 1957-1963).

So the darkness of the smoke is just a curtain  
 Look mighty Lord here we have mercy  
 Claps following FIN  
 A burst of fire of a thousand killed dinners<sup>45</sup>

Finally, the last example – a short text by Jerzy Oszelda, *Fanny i Aleksander*, doubtlessly alluding to the 1982 Bergman film, is fully devoted to an attempt at an aphoristic reflection of the state of the viewer following the film:

My awareness was hit by a stream  
 of second consciousness  
 Existential amperage of 1 Bergman (Bg)<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusions

The considerations presented here lead to two conclusions which are already suggested in the title. On the one hand, I would like to confirm that a poetic ekphrasis of a film is indeed possible, and support this claim with arguments about “ekphrasisticity” formulated by Adam Dziadek (in a different context), as well as with a number of examples of ekphrases (as full as possible). However, one characteristic of such an ekphrasis – moving away from the classical or traditional understanding – includes rather frequent (a separate list of examples) cases of a shifted perspective: from the film itself to *an account of seeing the film*. Although an ekphrasis of a work of art is possible through a detailed description (which brings it closer to hypotyposis), as well as an ekphrasis of a piece of music, thanks to adequate linguistic measures (the musicality of literature) and/or structural (for example in reference to composition), in the case of film ekphrases, the description of the very act of reception appears relatively frequently<sup>47</sup>: a cinematographic experience, which is often a formulating event, or at least strong enough to be subjected to an attempt at a poetic reflection. In such a conceptualization, the reader of a poem also functions according to a special set of laws, as they are simultaneously a film viewer (who remembers the original film described in the poem, and confronts two perspectives: poetic and their own).

The second conclusion is related to the first one. In the same way as the need or necessity to tell films has existed, a poetic reaction to a film is also understandable. After all, this is also a form of “film telling” which has specific reasons and goals. And again: the effect will not necessarily be a “proper” ekphrasis, and those attempts should not necessarily be considered ekphrasis – from the theoretical and genealogical perspective. Perhaps a shift from the field

<sup>45</sup> Więc ciemność dymu to tylko kurtyna  
 Patrz mocny Boże mamy oto litość  
 Trzaskają klapy po napisie FIN  
 Salwa tysiąca zabitych obiadów

<sup>46</sup> Świadomość moja otrzymała uderzenie strumienia  
 drugiej świadomości  
 Natężenie egzystencjalne 1 Bergman (Bg)

<sup>47</sup> Dziadek, *Obrazy i wiersze. Z zagadnień interferencji sztuk w polskiej poezji współczesnej*, 71-72.

of rhetoric to the ground of *cinema anthropology*, which is more interested in all the practices surrounding film, including telling films (including writing and reading poems about films), would be more adequate here. A side note can be added that a problem- or chronology-oriented organization of poems referring to specific pictures allows them to be read also as a form of reception – what was seen and when, which ones greatly impressed poets, which ones “deserved” a poem.

From the perspective of cinema anthropology, film telling is simply an everyday activity (something that people “do” with films) taking various forms and manifestations, which are conditioned by cultural contexts, sometimes widely different. In fact, it is a truism that film transformed the 20<sup>th</sup>-century (and later) culture and art, including poetry. However, it seems that the practice of “film telling” / “telling films” has played an especially interesting role – being both mundane and sophisticated, defined as an existential need – which is also reflected in poetry.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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# KEYWORDS

*cinema anthropology*

EKPHRASIS

**film poetry**

## **ABSTRACT:**

The paper attempts at collecting and interpreting a dozen or so film poems, by authors such as S. Grochowiak, K. Rodowska, A. Kuśniewicz, B. Zadura, K. Hoffman, J. Oszelda, G. Olszański. Out of numerous cases of transmedia relations (film – literature), examples which could be classified as ekphrases according to the rhetorical tradition are distinguished. The phenomenon of poetic film ekphrases has been completed with a cultural context, related to the different traditions of film telling, treated as a common practice (amateur, professional, artistic) and conceptualized with the framework of cinema anthropology.

## intersemiotic translation

### FILM TELLING

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# The Cinematic Materiality of Theory. Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Rivette\*

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Almost a century ago Karol Irzykowski observed that cinematic pictures are a form of literary materiality<sup>1</sup>, which was in line with the broader context of "subordinating" film studies to literature and linguistic research (in terms of methodology and infrastructure). However, with time it turned out that films offered original and idiomatic means of expression, and hence critics began to talk about a reverse transfer of qualities and inspirations: features that were generally film-related or characteristic of film were subsequently adapted to the needs of literature<sup>2</sup>.

Insofar as research into the cinematic materiality of literature – i.e., broadly speaking, research into various film techniques which would, at least theoretically, make literature less "text-centric", seeking extralinguistic values in it – seems to be a noticeable trend in the humanities today (though perhaps not a very popular one), film inspirations or tensions in literary theories are dis-

<sup>1</sup> See. Karol Irzykowski. *Dziesiąta muza: zagadnienia estetyczne kina* [The tenth muse: aesthetic issues of the cinema] (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> Here the notion of the film editing technique allowing to freely and creatively connect various spatial and temporal sets is an excellent and classic example. See for instance Robert Humphrey. *Strumień świadomości – techniki* [Stream of consciousness in the modern novel], translated into Polish by Stefan Amsterdamski. "Pamiętnik Literacki", No 61/4 (1970), 274 onwards.



cussed far less frequently. Films are often discussed by theoreticians, such as Slavoj Žižek<sup>3</sup>, but generally speaking, they much more rarely notice the analogy between materially- or affectively-engaging cinema and the equally cognitively exciting paths of different theories (which sometimes demonstrate that the process of interpretation can resemble solving a crime mystery).

I am not going to look into all the possible “cinematic” engagements of theory (the functioning of films in methodological texts and – in line with the theme of the last volume – cinematic techniques making use of theories in a structural way, rather than in the form of examples of or evidence for the usefulness of a given vocabulary), implications (the types of such functions, the reasons behind them or their consequences), nor exemplifications themselves, for that would obviously go beyond the scope of a single paper. Instead, I would like to focus on one very interesting example – *Out 1 (Noli me tangere)* by Jacques Rivette – which shows not only the incorporation of literature – and theory – into a film (or rather a film extensively inspired by a word and its application in the work), but also reveals a profound analogy between strategies found in literary theory and cinematic means of expression, and determines the material, performative character of various methodological reflections. My paper is also based on the interpretation of this film and its literary contexts (such as the works of Balzac and Carroll) by Gilles Deleuze, a philosopher popular among literary theoreticians.

The film in question is legendary (because of its length, scope and evanescence) and at the same time somewhat forgotten (due to the shockingly low numbers of cinemas showing it and – until recently – to the lack of an official, legal version). The 1971 film is almost 13 hours long, and to a great extent improvised. At almost the same time, a shorter (roughly 4-hour-long) version was made, known as *Out 1: Spectre*; however, neither of the two versions was very popular<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, despite its niche and enigmatic character, it is often said to be the *opus magnum* of the French New Wave, a modernist artistic movement focusing on the maximal exploitation of the cinematic form<sup>5</sup>.

The film tells the story of two theatre groups: the first one, led by Lili (Michele Moretti) is working on staging *Seven Against Thebes*, whereas the other one, led by Thomas (Michael Lindsay), Lili's ex – *Prometheus Bound*. The two groups, in spite of dealing with two plays by the same author (Aeschylus) and being led by a former couple – display very different approaches to performative art, and (which would perhaps be of more interest to literature studies) have different attitudes to their plays' lexical layer: the first group is first trying to “enter into” their play through meditation and yoga<sup>6</sup>, and then (due to Lili's pressure) to precisely recreate

<sup>3</sup> See for example Slavoj Žižek, *Patrząc z ukosa: do Lacana przez kulturę popularną* [Looking Awry. An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture]. Translation into Polish by Janusz Margański. Warszawa: KR, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> In Poland, the full version of the film was presented during Rivette's retrospective at Nowe Horyzonty film festival in 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Rafał Syska, *Światy wewnętrzne* [Internal worlds]. In: *Sekretne światy Jacquesa Rivette'a* [Jacques Rivette's secret worlds]. Rafał Syska (ed.). Kraków: EKRANy, 2017: 67. Basically many New Wave films could be interpreted according to that key (as a reflexive materialization of various theories): there would be enough examples even if we limited them to the most obvious ones, such as films inspired by literature, including *nouveau roman* (Rive Gauche, represented by Alain Resnais) or the equally “intertextual” cinema (similarly to Rivette) connected to “Cahiers du cinéma” by Jean-Luc Godard (especially *Band of Outsiders*, in which one of the protagonists uses – perhaps perversely – Arthur Rimbaud's pseudonym).

<sup>6</sup> For more on the meaning of yoga and body acting in *Out 1* – see Donatella Valente and Brad Stevens. *Jacques Rivette's Out 1: From First to Last – Senses of Cinema*. Date of access: 30.12.2020. <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2016/jacques-rivette/out-1-from-first-to-last/>.

the ancient text, which later becomes the reason behind the conflict in the group, ultimately leading to the project's flop. Renaud, a character who is invited to join, proves to be especially destructive to it as he not only challenges the director's artistic vision, but also robs his fellow cast member, which makes the whole cast carry out an investigation (whose results are nonetheless never revealed). The second group works according to Grotowski's method<sup>7</sup>. Early on they try to improvise specific events taking place in the play (for example, they take turns impersonating the bound victim so that they can empathize with Prometheus), almost completely abandoning the text in favor of affective, performative work with the body.

The stories of the two theater groups and their individual members are intertwined with those of other characters. For example, there is Frédérique, a young woman (played by Juliet Berto, whom the director liked a lot), a thief (including confidential information) and black-mailer. She discovers a secret society to which – allegedly – the actors belong. Later, she falls in love with a local gang member and eventually is killed by him. Colin (played by the famous Jean-Pierre Léaud) is another, even more interesting atom-character. For some time, he does not appear in the main story of the film (if we can even talk about the main story in the case of this particular film). He pretends to be a deaf-mute outsider, making a living by chatting up random customers of a local café. He offers them envelopes containing pages torn from random books (probably treating them as “divinations”); he draws their attention by playing a harmonica. Later Colin himself gets such a “letter”, which he reads as an encrypted message that he tries to decode and interpret. As a result, he discovers the same conspiracy as Frédérique, known as the Thirteen, and falls in love with Pauline, who owns a niche book store, which is a meeting place for Parisian anarchists. However, as it turns out, Pauline is also involved in the conspiracy (where she used the name Emilie) – at least via her husband, the mysterious Igor, who does not appear on screen.

This is how the stories intersect, with the Thirteen in the center of the plot, which obviously leads to associations with Balzac: Rivette (in this film, as well as in others) clearly refers to *The Human Comedy*. In the volume *History of the Thirteen*, which belongs to *Scenes of Parisian Life* (comprising shorter novels: *Ferragus*, *The Duchess of Langeais*, *Girl with Golden Eyes*)<sup>8</sup>, there are allusions to the existence of a mysterious and probably menacing secret society to which individual characters belong. However, the society does not reveal itself directly – there is no confirmation whether it actually exists, what aims and intentions it may have; Balzac himself did not pay much attention to that alleged conspiracy – it was probably simply an attractive hole in the realistic narration which was supposed to fascinate readers and motivate them to continue reading. The “menace” of the group was provided especially by the unlucky number of its members.

Importantly, neither Balzac nor Rivette “realize” the symbolic number on any surface: *Out 1*, divided into eight roughly 90-minute episodes, ends a few minutes before 1 p.m., and the number of actors in the two theater groups never reaches the magical (and unlucky) 13. Even the

<sup>7</sup> See Syska, *Światy wewnętrzne*, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Historia trzynastu: Urzędnicy*. [The Thirteen] *Komedia ludzka: studia obyczajowe* [Human comedy: studies of manners]. *Sceny z życia paryskiego* [Scenes from Parisian life]. Translated into Polish by Tadeusz Żeleński, Julian Rogoziński. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1959.

character of Renaud does not provide the explicit “symbolic agreement”, although he clearly has the character of the Biblical “thirteenth apostle”: he both sins and motivates the development of the story, since his disappearance becomes the motor force behind various interactions between other characters. The full 13, reduced by the absence of two characters (the already mentioned Igor and one Pierre, mentioned in stolen documents) could be completed by the young blackmailer, who is eventually murdered by a local gang (deprived of any “menacing” symbolism – it is actually dangerous), and Colin, who also manages to find members of the secret society, and even confront them; however, he is pushed aside by the society and returns to his role as a recluse who refuses to have any personal contact with the world.

Thus – just as in Balzac – numbers refuse to offer any simple symbolism, or rather the construction of the film does not offer any “symbolic” representation (or, perversely, realistic: if the Thirteen has some influence on the plot both in Balzac and in Rivette, it should “actually exist”). However, these confusing suggestions and figures do not lead us only to the simple observation that *Out 1* is a precisely planned and executed film (although this observation is not completely wrong), neither do they limit the analysis to a simple interpretation, seeing this film as a portrait of a disorganized world, and hence – in a sense – a non-realistic one.

The film offers many more possible meanings: the first one is of course the revelation in the “autothematic” context, in which *mise en abyme* is seen as a reaction to the crisis of realism and its having been discredited<sup>9</sup>. In his films, Rivette – similarly to Balzac – constructs a specific space, which only seems to be an organized universe. In *The Human Comedy* there are plenty of inaccuracies – in Poland they were traced (among others) by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, the famous translator of Balzac’s works. Boy-Żeleński demonstrated how freely Balzac dealt with his protagonists in *The Human Comedy*: the famous Lucien de Rubempré is one example, portrayed first in *Lost Illusions*, and later featured in *A Harlot High and Low*, however – as observed by the translator – without attention to precision in terms of the chronological order of events<sup>10</sup>. In this context, the disorder of “the Thirteen”, and the failure of any enterprise presented by Rivette (the failure of rehearsals and abandonment of the projects, the secrecy of the Thirteen, Colin’s secondary alienation) are all intentional: just like in Balzac, they are supposed to represent the lack of any actual, “deep” organization behind the world – instead, this organization is shown as a superficial, symbolic ideal which does not translate into “reality” (understood this way or another). For “reality” – regardless of the rights and regularities attributed to it – never achieves the perfect transparency.

Despite belonging to the avant-garde New Wave, Rivette never gave up on the film realism that shaped him. However, like the great masters of literary realism, he did not treat it as an

<sup>9</sup> See Agnieszka Waligóra, *Autotematyzm – antyrealizm? Na przykładzie jednego wiersza Tomasza Pułki* [Mise-en-abyme – anti-realism? On the example of one poem by Tomasz Pułka], “Forum Poetyki” 15-16 (2019), 80-93. Date of access 30.12.2020 <http://fp.amu.edu.pl/autotematyzm-antyrealizm-na-przykladzie-jednego-wiersza-tomasza-pulki/>.

<sup>10</sup> Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński. *Od tłumacza* [Translator’s note] in Balzac, Honoré de, *Blaski i nędze życia kurtyzany* [A Harlot High and Low]. Komedia ludzka. Studia obyczajowe. Sceny z życia paryskiego [Human comedy. Studies of manners. Studies from Parisian life], translated by Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński. Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza “Czytelnik”, 1959: 7 onwards.

art “ideology”: Balzac himself presented Rivette’s “peculiar realism”, corresponding with the dialectically modern doubt in continuity and predictability of the world<sup>11</sup>. For many scholars Balzac is a precursor of Baudelaire (and the symbolists that followed him), who resigned from the idea of a simple, clear construction of the world<sup>12</sup>, due to his almost expressionistic portrayal of space, love for the secrets of Parisian streets and rural boudoirs. *The Human Comedy* contains a lot of intriguing evidence for the “incomplete” realism of Balzac (if there was any “complete” realism), and, at the same time, clearly corresponds with numerous scenes from *Out 1*. For instance, there is one in which Colin is trying to decipher the message hidden in an abandoned letter; the incoherent text may resemble passages from *The Physiology of Marriage*, in which Balzac – probably in order to omit topics considered controversial for the censorship or the sensitive, easily ruffled audience – “encrypted” a significant portion of the book in a mysterious way. According to Boy’s note, this text had never been decoded (in Polish) – in the Polish translation the code does not make any sense<sup>13</sup>.

Hence both Balzac and Rivette – in spite of the numerous inconsistencies and failures that can be found in their works – not only produced (postulatively, although not “literally”) realistic worlds, but also functioned in the spaces inside their own works, treating them as equally “real” as contemporary social or political events. Rivette enthusiastically referred to the cosmos (or rather chaos-cosmos) of Balzac, as evidenced by the reference to the *History of the Thirteen*, which Rivette – as he himself admitted – treated mostly as an excuse for combining the plotlines of his protagonists<sup>14</sup>. The motif of conspiracy and individual blackmail (represented by the recluse Frédérique in *Out 1*) is very common in Rivette’s films; the 1988 *Gang of Four* is the most clear example. Also *The Beautiful Troublemaker* – one of his most famous films – was based on *The Unknown Masterpiece* by Balzac, a story about a painter Frenhofer and his attempts at painting a portrait of an exceptional woman; *The Beautiful Troublemaker* employs a plot technique similar to *Out 1* – viewers never find out what the portrait looks like, for Frenhofer hides it, whereas *Noli me tangere* never reveals whether the conspiracy was actually real and what it was about<sup>15</sup>.

References to Balzac and their theoretical implications go even further, and provide an increasingly stronger autothematic or meta-artistic basis for Rivette’s film, which is not turned

<sup>11</sup>See Tomasz Kłys. *Narodziny filmu z ducha teatru* [The birth of film from the theater’s spirit]. In *Sekretne światy Jacquesa Rivette’a*, 23.

<sup>12</sup>On the issues of space see especially Gisèle Séginger, *Wpisanie polityki w przestrzeń: “Stracone złudzenia” i dwuznaczność Balzakowskiej topografii* [The Policy Inscribed in the Space. Lost illusions and the Ambiguity in Balzac’s Topography], translated by Piotr Śniedziwski. “Rocznik Komparatystyczny” 3 (2012); and Cesare Pavese, *Le Métier de vivre*, Paris: Gallimard 1958, 45.

<sup>13</sup>See Honoré de Balzac. *Fizjologia małżeństwa* [The Physiology of Marriage]. Translation into Polish and introduction by Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy. Warszawa: Czytelnik 1957, 284-285; such a stylistic and “logical” break in the construction was in fact considered to be a mistake or incoherence according to the requirements of realism.

<sup>14</sup>See Jonathan Rosenbaum, Lauren Sedofsky, Gilbert Adair. *Widmowe rozmowy z Rivette’em* [Interview: Jacques Rivette]. Translation into Polish by Miłosz Stelmach. In *Sekretne światy Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 103.

<sup>15</sup>The theater was an equally popular motif in Rivette’s work; in many cases he filmed theatrical groups working on particular plays (typically very classical, either written by the ancient precursors, or the great French tragedies). See Syska *Światy wewnętrzne*, 67-68. The fact that one of the more important biographies of Balzac, published in 1965 by André Maurois, was entitled *Prometheus*, can be important in this context, as a possibly less important yet interesting connection between *Out 1* and Balzac’s project. Polish edition: Maurois, André. *Prometeusz, czyli Życie Balzaka*. Translated by Julian Rogoziński. Warszawa: Czytelnik 1970.

towards itself as much as it is turned towards worlds and spaces synergistically created by literature, theater and cinema. After decoding the reference to *History of the Thirteen* in the “message”, Colin goes to a scholar of Balzac (played by Eric Rohmer, a director who was then working on his cycle *Six Moral Tales*, also based on *The Human Comedy*). The visual layer is also full of emblems of *mise-en-abyme*, idiomatic to the cinema (or more broadly: any visual arts) – for example, there is a famous scene, constructed according to a *mise-en-abyme* rule: Pauline/Emilie, full of doubt, unfaithful to both her husband and society, is standing in between two mirrors. Her reflection, multiplied by a now-famous optical illusion, symbolizes her sense of being lost – Pauline is trying to rethink her behavior and needs, however, she can only deal with mediated reflections rather than with a clean, perfect “I”<sup>16</sup>. The problem of alienation and detachment from the world, in this case implied by the autothematic motif (yet not necessarily in all the other ones), leads to another important overtone of the film – its political and social significance.

*Out 1* was made in 1971 – not long after the mass strikes that took place almost everywhere in the western world. Rivette often alluded to the atrophy of social life observed in the 1960s and 1970s, which was opposed in many ways. He did it in both his films and texts<sup>17</sup>; for instance, he claimed that the story in *Out 1* was supposed to end in 1968<sup>18</sup>. His 13-hour film can thus be seen as a study into life after a (failed) revolution. Collective initiatives became disorganized and dispersed, losing all subjectivity and emancipating potential – if anything, only remnants of group activity were left, like the Thirteen: a group of uncertain existence, which rather than devoting itself to action focuses on creating a sense of mystery and threat. It corresponds with the cold war trauma, prevalent in the 1970s, which according to some scholars led to a conspiratorial perception of reality – looking for hidden and potentially deadly projects<sup>19</sup>. Genuine social movements (microorganizations and associations) portrayed in *Out 1* include either local gangs of thugs, who do not believe in any ideas and work only for their own benefit (the man who killed Frédérique), or quasi-anarchists, bored and devoid of real energy, who devote themselves mostly to passive contestation (the youth gathering in Pauline/Emilie’s bookstore).

Seen from this perspective, Frédérique and Colin – free atoms busy with their own survival, indifferent to the common interest (or – like in the case of Colin – fascinated with some idea of community, but excluded from it or detaching himself from it) – become emblematic of the whole of French society. Hence, like Balzac, Rivette wants to show a cross-section of society: however, he treats it in a specific way, as for him every character (regardless of their status or

<sup>16</sup>This scene (a part of a broader motif of doubles and “non-identity” in Rivette’s artistic project) also corresponds with a very interesting text, describing the role of mirrors in *Eugénie Grandet*: Naomi Schor, *Eugénie Grandet*. Translated by Agata Zawiszeńska. “Pamiętnik Literacki” 4 (2009): 99-112. Date of access: 30.12.2020 <https://fbc.pionier.net.pl/details/nnrd81W>. Naomi Schor argues there that the mirror and the analogy between a woman’s ageing and the process of excluding her from the public world is significant for the description of her transformation towards old age.

<sup>17</sup>See Martin, Adrian. *Wielki manipulator* [The Great Manipulator], translated by Miłosz Stelmach, *Sekretne światy Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 58

<sup>18</sup>See Rosenbaum, Sedofsky, Adair, *Widmowe rozmowy z Rivette’em*, 100.

<sup>19</sup>As Rafał Syska wrote – Rivette’s whole “cosmology” was founded on the then popular notion based on a conspiracy theory, making it impossible to take a stand regarding the surrounding world (which was supposed to result in the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s love for autothematic art). Syska, *Widmowe światy*, 64.

wealth) is predominantly either self-centered or focused on rebuilding lost social micro-bonds. However, none of the characters manages to do the latter: the final scene in which Thomas has a breakdown after being rejected by Lili and his coworkers (as a result of many lies between them), Colin's return to a controversial means of making money and his refusal to have any direct contact with the world, Frédérique's death at the hand of her beloved, Beatrice's failed relationship, Georges's (Lili's lover) and Igor's (Pauline's husband) absence, the pregnancy of the lonely Iris (Pauline's children's nanny), and finally Marie, who is unsuccessful at finding Renaud (she is shown in the film's final scene) – the film leaves an impression that any form of community life (regardless of the scale) has become impossible<sup>20</sup>.

Rivette's film – although it does not have any significant emancipating potential<sup>21</sup> and seems to contain numerous fictional points of reference, which according to the conventional optics move it away from "real" life (as evidenced especially in improvised scenes and those with "natural" Parisians, often surprised by the actors' behavior). The famous passage with Jean-Pierre Léaud reciting the aforementioned mysterious messages is one of the most important scenes of this sort – improvised, with passers-by rather than extras.

Colin is trying to solve the mystery of the passage in two different, though fundamentally complementary ways. The first one is scrupulous philological and "cryptological" analysis: he breaks the text into verses, and then tries to uncover their meaning by rereading, as well as by consulting a university expert (Rohmer). The scholar convinces him – in line with the commonly accepted interpretation – that Balzac's *Thirteen* are not to be treated seriously, for they are only a narrative functor, which the author himself quickly abandons. Nonetheless, Colin is trying to find the encrypted (as he believes) message through scrupulous operations: he counts the sounds and graphemes in each verse, underlines words that are repeated (most of which refer to numbers), he marks the first letters of words, trying to find a hidden acrostic. Eventually, by means of a convoluted system, he manages to create the name Warok, used by an associate of the supposed association, who later vehemently denies the existence of any association in a conversation with Colin and Frédérique<sup>22</sup>.

However, Colin is more than just an astute reader. In the famous Paris walk scene he also becomes an inspired reciter, who repeats, as if in a trance, unfinished sentences of a passage he believes to be coherent – which he treats as a message waiting to be decoded and interpreted, although he cannot be certain that this is in fact true. Snark and Boojum, two characters that appear in the text, lead him to Lewis Carroll – actually, it is thanks to this intertextual

<sup>20</sup>Balzac himself was a keen observer and commentator on the instability, inefficiency and weakness of the political system in which he lived, also expressing his conviction regarding the resulting, highly harmful atomization of the public life. Séglinger, *Wpisanie polityki w przestrzeń: "Stracone złudzenia" i dwuznaczność Balzakovskiej topografii*, 240 onwards.

<sup>21</sup>See Laura U. Marks, *Workshipping for Ideas: Jacques Rivette's "Out 1: Noli me tangere"*. "The Cine-Files" 10 (2016). Date of access: 2.01.2021 <http://www/thecine-files.com/marks2016>.

<sup>22</sup>Colin visits him in the apartment where the other members of the *Thirteen* are, and Warok is starting to think that perhaps Igor or Pierre are recruiting new members; however, he does not have sufficient knowledge of his comrades' intentions, which again shows the whole conspiracy's phoney character (excluding communication among members) and the downfall of any human interactions.

reference that he manages to decipher (or guess) the hidden meaning of the whole text<sup>23</sup>. Colin's focus on the text and his wish to decipher the message which – he believes – the text transmits shows different means of working with language and literature, and more broadly, different ways of problematizing the meaning of art, starting from positivist genetic criticism, based on the study of the biographical and historical context (consulting the scholar), through a detailed philological analysis, which Rivette treats as an anatomical dissection of sentences, and finally, an affective and performative reading: Colin realizes the final stress only when he reads the text out loud, like a mantra, which is when he decides to pay more attention to it. This is also how the text reveals how it was designed to sound (and work) – when read silently it does not unveil its “sense”, and the series of “logical” operations by Colin proves to be an insufficient analysis method.

Colin and his “cryptological” and performative approach to the text leads us to the problem of its content – or more generally, to the issue of sense in general, in terms of a work of art and existence: the question whether the central conspiracy in *Out 1* actually functioned, and whether the text studied by Colin was actually a hidden message, remains a key question to many scholars<sup>24</sup>. Again: Rivette often declared that he never attached much significance to the figure of the Thirteen, treating them only as a plot device which allowed him to combine the storylines of all the characters (which he later separates). The conspiracy does not exist in Balzac nor in the film – in the sense that its existence is never proved, and it never reveals itself fully: quite to the contrary, the actions of characters convinced of its existence are confusing and mutually contradictory. Warok denies the existence of the conspiracy when talking to Colin and Frédérique, although they would complete it in a material (and numerical) way in the light of the absence of Igor and Pierre; he also claims he does not know about the intentions and actions of other members. Etienne is such a naïve conspirator that he invites a stranger to his apartment, and his whole role is reduced to being a source of disinformation – he allows secret information to be stolen from him, although this information is never fully revealed. Hence the most important characters, elements and motifs remain absent – they function onscreen in the form of a functional lack.

One could of course argue that the secrecy of the association is expressed by obfuscating it from the audience (both readers of Balzac and viewers of Rivette). However, the approach of the characters (and viewers) to the very idea of meaningfulness, problematized through the presence of the structural “ignorance” in the plot and visual layers, become one of the most interesting and significant tropes regarding the reflective materialization of theory in art. Those familiar with literary studies will notice that *Out 1* shows a confrontation of two major academic approaches: those aimed at the existence of meaning, and those focused on

<sup>23</sup>My understanding of sense here is a bit more general – as some broad-based meaning or functionality. On the other hand, Gilles Deleuze, to whom I henceforth frequently refer, understands it first of all as relations between different notions, also noticing that it is hidden in the ideas (or desires) of the speaker. See Gilles Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, translation into Polish by Grzegorz Wilczyński, corrected by Mikołaj Herer. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN: Warszawa 2011, 37. It should also be noted that Colin changes the French word *equipage* to the English *crew* – the “deciphering” takes place on the verge of two languages, in translation.

<sup>24</sup>It also corresponds with a text by Laura U. Marks, in which she summarizes research into *Out 1*. In the text, she argues that previous interpretations of the film focused on that dialectic tension between “life” and “meaning”, of which that life is supposed to be deprived. See Marks.



the constructability of coherent meanings depending on the perspective and needs of the recipient of a work of art<sup>25</sup>.

The first approach is characteristic of hermeneutics, whose fundamental assumptions are perfectly in line with Colin's first interpretative strategy: he assumes that the text is a message which requires decoding, carrying a particular and predominantly true meaning, which delineates new paths of a "real" life for him. He thus uses every piece of an analytical apparatus trying to study the possible contexts and functioning of the book to which the text refers (purely philologically, historically and performatively), not for a moment doubting the essentiality and antecedence of the meaning of his passage (or, more generally – stating authoritatively that any linguistic utterance is a form of communication). Viewed from this perspective, Colin is "textualized" – by distributing envelopes with random book pages he becomes a "messenger" (classically – of meaning, in the film – of a text whose meaning is doubtless), whose figure we can find in hermeneutics.

The hermeneutic strategy fails – Colin does not join the association, remaining an unaffiliated, free and lonely entity. However, viewers know that if the Thirteen exist, Colin definitely found their trace: he was lied to not by the text, but by people; failed communication takes place not due to misunderstanding the text, but due to external factors.

It is thus hard to doubt the purposefulness of the text: even if Colin receives it randomly, and decodes it through a series of random and illogical operations, he does uncover (or reveal) a certain message. However, if one stops to think whose intention stands behind that message, *intention lectoris* would be supported by most arguments, rather than *operis* or *auctoris* – Colin does not know that he reaches the author of the message (the Thirteen) and that he experiences some sort of initiation (into the association). During the decoding process he clearly forgets about his own role as a "messenger" – after all, he did make a living by sending random passages of text, which most likely were carefully read by his "clients", thus acquiring a secondary meaning.

The film thus accepts various possible functions of text and language without stating the primacy of either of the two: the existence of the conspiracy or its phantasmaticity – or both modalities simultaneously: the Thirteen could exist, but without a specific number of members or a specific aim, or it could function only as a purely linguistic postulate, which ultimately does not have to deprive it of its realness – it depends on the viewer. This obviously leads to the second, equally interesting "theoretical", pragmatic and post-structural strategy. Rivette highlighted (closely corresponding with poststructural theses) that what we treat as real, becomes real (as it has real consequences and translates into the actions and worldview of specific individuals). It can thus be assumed that wherever recipients (including the "external" recipient, Colin) see some meaning, this meaning exists: Colin, so keen on engage-

<sup>25</sup>Michał Paweł Markowski has written extensively on the relation between essentialism and pragmatism. See Michał Paweł Markowski, *Interpretacja i literatura* [Interpretation and literature], "Teksty Drugie" No 5 (70), 2001. I ignore the obvious problem resulting from contrasting hermeneutics and pragmatics – the hermeneutic strategy is also some receptive problem, and thus it accords with pragmatics to the most general extent. However, this problem goes beyond the scope of this paper.



ment and a sense of community, assumes that the conspiracy (fictional already in Balzac) is real, or even more broadly: the conspirators, so keen on adrenaline and subjectivity, decide to turn fiction into reality, blurring the lines between a work of art or a fantasy construction and “reality”: the process of “meaning-making” and consequences of completing it are analogous in both cases.

This problem is excellently explored by Gilles Deleuze<sup>26</sup>, so important for French theory. In *Logic of Sense*, which Rivette definitely knew<sup>27</sup>, there is an extended passage devoted to *The Hunting of the Snark* (used by Rivette in the scene with Colin’s mantra recitation), in which the philosopher argues for the role of lack as the driving force for the plot. According to Deleuze, mysteries (and more generally, misunderstandings, inaccuracies, contradictions) are the main impulse for fascinations and motivations for creating meaning: he observes that the system’s initiation and dynamization is based on taking away (or concealing) a certain element<sup>28</sup>, which is in line with Rivette’s views, who sees the essence of cinema as a bond with something external and very secret, revealed without explanations by an unpredictable gesture<sup>29</sup> (which also corresponds with Balzac’s love for secrets<sup>30</sup>).

Obviously in most cases the mystery is solved. Nonetheless, with some plot elements – like the symbolic Thirteen – something else happens. We do not learn whether the conspiracy really exists; moreover, the conspiracy question becomes irrelevant in the light of the “more real” forms of ill will between the characters<sup>31</sup>, and ultimately – as argued by Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues – everyone is a member of the Thirteen, for everyone starts to display some sort of ill will. As Nerval writes in *Artémis* – “Number Thirteen returns...and is yet number One”<sup>32</sup>: the association which was supposed to function as one common body disintegrates onscreen and becomes a series of lonely entities. According to Deleuze, Balzac, and Rivette, this “community” was concentrated around the unknown and the mechanisms of its dispersion<sup>33</sup>; the very idea of a circle reveals itself not just dialectically, in the form of an impossible community, but also in the repetitive (sic!) motifs of circularity, periodicity and constant mobility (the “mirror, not narrative” repeatability, as Liandrat-Guigues<sup>34</sup> put it), rather than “numericality”. The presence of symbols in the outer layer of works of art (for example – titles) rather than in their deep structure, corresponds with the appreciation of the “surface”, which Deleuze – following Valéry – sees as the most significant and, paradoxically, the deepest component of any entity<sup>35</sup>. The “superficial” game of meanings is the deepest in the sense that it most clearly

<sup>26</sup>A film researcher (and one studying Rivette), and additionally a source of inspiration to the director.

<sup>27</sup>Compare Adrian Martin, *Wielki manipulator*, translated by Miłosz Stelmach, *Sekretne światy Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 51-63. The whole article demonstrates deep relations between the philosopher’s thought and Rivette’s work.

<sup>28</sup>Martin.

<sup>29</sup>Jacques Rivette, *L’art. de la fugue*. “Cahiers du Cinéma” No 26, 1953: 50. In Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues, *Geniusz melancholii* [Genius of melancholy], translated by Elżbieta Lubelska, *Sekretne światy Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 71.

<sup>30</sup>See Pavese, *Le Métier de vivre*, 45.

<sup>31</sup>See Syska, *Światy wewnętrzne*, 66. Syska writes about a significantly more “intangible” source of unclear networks of connections between protagonists and events.

<sup>32</sup>See Liandrat-Guigues, *Geniusz melancholii*, 79-80. This connection would also be explained by the title.

<sup>33</sup>See Gilles Deleuze. *Les trois cercles de Rivette*. “Cahiers du Cinéma” No 416 (1989).

<sup>34</sup>Liandrat-Guigues, *Geniusz melancholii*, 81.

<sup>35</sup>Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, 26-27.

provokes cognitive effort and leads to the creation of an event (such as a confrontation of characters), which differs by definition in terms of its lack of meaning from entities, objects and states of objects<sup>36</sup>: it is thus irrelevant whether the association has ever existed nor what it did, if it led to some action even in the form of “lack”.

It should be added that this “meaningfulness” which we keep looking for – and which the protagonists of *Out 1* are looking for – does not have a clearly intelligible, or even textual ontology. According to Deleuze, meaning is disembodied, yet it becomes a pure event, which exists or lasts in a sentence<sup>37</sup>; thus regardless whether we see it as a construct, or as a “natural”, binding component of the world, it has some material agency. According to Deleuze Carroll’s snark is the perfect example here, an analogon of meaning: it is simultaneously some (postulative), dangerous (a combination of a snake and a shark) body, and a purely textual entity (an effect of word-formation), it is that constantly lengthened – and at the same time drawn – line by the two series<sup>38</sup>, a bond between the space of signs and the space of the non-exclusively semiotic matter. “For the Snark was a Boojum”<sup>39</sup>, reads the final verse of the poem: meaning – elusive beyond its event-related consequences – thus functions on two levels<sup>40</sup>, it is a purely abstract creation and, at the same time, a supposedly somatic and causative one. Carroll himself believed in that. In the preface to the *Hunting of the Snark* he writes about “hunting for meaning”, just like Snark was hunted: “Fetch it home by all means—you may serve it with greens, / And it’s handy for striking a light. / You may seek it with thimbles—and seek it with care / You may hunt it with forks and hope; / You may threaten its life with a railway-share; / You may charm it with smiles and soap”<sup>41</sup>, for the hunters realized the unclear ontology of the monster, which motivated them to make a multidirectional effort.

Colin becomes the most important “materialization” of the critical theses: thanks to his fascination with the riddle of the text, and the secret of the conspiracy – thanks to his recognition (or construction) of the secret knowledge hidden in the letter, Colin not only starts to work with language, against which he clearly rebelled (he pretended to be deaf-mute), but also performatively engages in the external world. The “solution” of the mystery – decoding the text and the discovery that it does not have to contain a real rather than a fictional point of reference – brings the character another aboulia, whose various forms (observable not only in Colin, but also in other characters) exhaust the film’s narration (or rather – if one argued for the incoherence of *Out 1* – exhaust the series of pictures that the film offers). Thus paradoxically thanks to Colin’s exclusion from the circle, his fate makes a full one; Colin returns to the starting point, i.e. his refusal to be in touch with the world and to function in it.

<sup>36</sup>Deleuze, 25.

<sup>37</sup>Deleuze, 39.

<sup>38</sup>Lewis Carroll, *Wyprawa na żmirlacza. Męka w ośmiu konwulsjach* [The Hunting of the Snark (An Agony in 8 Fits)], translation into Polish by Robert Stiller, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie 1982, 49.

<sup>39</sup>Carroll, 66. Compare with Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, 101.

<sup>40</sup>For what the “theory of two meanings packed into one words like to a suitcase, which was announced by Humpty Dumpty was about, see Lewis, *Wyprawa na żmirlacza*, 7.

<sup>41</sup>Carroll, *Wyprawa na żmirlacza. Męka w ośmiu konwulsjach*, 64.

Colin's story also proves that without the driving force of a mystery or doubts which one tries to dispel, no action is possible. If *Out 1* focused only on Colin, his autonomous decision (resigning from interpretative procedures) would lead to a "pure" final. However, Rivette opted for an open form of his film: "overruling" the composition results not from the "opening" which ends with a suggestion that Marie will continue looking for Renaud, but rather from the film's constant imitation of the materiality of a theater play or a picture taking place onscreen (like in the case of *The Beautiful Troublemaker*), which never takes a full, complete form, and thus will never produce – at least if one is in favor of formal, structural, or hermeneutic conceptualizations – the final pool of possible meanings. Any kind of "closure" for the film depends here on the viewers<sup>42</sup>: there is no author or omniscient narrator, who would guarantee the coherence and meaningfulness of the represented world. As Hélène Frappat explains, the author disappears behind the film, the director never has anything to say, it is the film that speaks<sup>43</sup> (and as Rivette commented – "the only truth is that of the filmstock and the actors"<sup>44</sup>). Thus – in some sense – Balzac's *The Human Comedy*, and more specifically his *History of the Thirteen*, and Carroll's *Hunting of the Snark* also have a cinematic "structure" (or at least the structure of New Wave cinema – often based on understatements): they are to the same extent based on the mechanism of inspiring fascination by the functional lack or uncertainty.

*Out 1*, which openly reveals its inspiration in Balzac and Carroll, has to show itself not as an anti-realist, but rather post-realist film: it does not assume the falseness of a construct just because it is a construct. Quite to the contrary – it points to the productivity of the components whose "constructiveness" is indisputable<sup>45</sup>. As Frappat observes, conspiracy is not a solipsistic illusion (something exists because I thought of it), but rather collective thinking (something exists because we talked about it)<sup>46</sup>. In this sense, a work of art is founded not through the possibility of re-presentation (predominantly – a semiotic, linguistic one), but within a given piece of work that representation cannot turn into improvisation, deprived of the logic of reasons and consequences; and according to Deleuze, in a world of bodies there are no reasons nor consequences: all bodies are solely reasons for themselves and for each other<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>42</sup>See Kłys, *Narodziny filmu z ducha teatru*, 23.

<sup>43</sup>Hélène Frappat, *Mise en scène*, translated by Elżbieta Lubelska, *Sekretne światy Jacques'a Rivette'a*, 37. Seen from this perspective, the New Wave cinema (despite its strong individualism, which is somewhat behind the creative process, but not necessarily in a given work itself) constitutes (at least in some cases) the materialization of Roland Barthes's theory regarding the death of an author.

<sup>44</sup>Rosenbaum, Sedofsky, Adair, *Widmowe rozmowy z Rivette'em*, 104.

<sup>45</sup>For a cross-section discussion on constructivism, post-constructivism and weak realism see Ewa Bińczyk, *Technonauka w społeczeństwie ryzyka. Filozofia wobec niepożądanych następstw praktycznego sukcesu nauki* [Technoscience in a society of risk. Philosophy and the unwanted consequences of the practical success of science]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK 2012 (especially the chapter *Postkonstruktywizm w badaniach nad nauką* [Post-constructivism in studies on science]: 51 onwards). On the limits of mimesis in terms of Balzac's *Unknown Masterpiece* – which is about an excellent painting which none but the painter saw see Seweryna Wysłouch, "Nieznane arcydzieło" Balzaca – rzecz o granicach "mimesis", *Piękno wieku dziewiętnastego. Studia i szkice z historii literatury i estetyki*, 277-287, [Unknown Masterpiece by Balzac – on the limits of "mimesis", Beauty of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Studies and sketches on the history of literature and aesthetics], edited by Elżbieta Nowicka and Zbigniew Przychodniak, Poznań: Wydawnictwo PTPN 2008.

<sup>46</sup>Frappat, *Mise en scène*, 41.

<sup>47</sup>Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, 19.

The cinema – as the materiality of the word rooted in the audiovisual environment, as well as a mechanism which enables seeing the immanent materiality of a text revealed through the analogy between the “action” of film and the “action” of literature – in this interpretation becomes not a simple materialization of a word (or a theory) as much as the reflective discovery of the agency of speech, the “cinematicity” of its “modernity” (which, according to Frappat, is about conceiving conspiracies deprived of any intention<sup>48</sup>), and (ultimately) moving the “property” of that word from the author-textual level to improvising actors, whom Rivette saw through the prism of their material, corporal and affective input in the film<sup>49</sup>. For interpretation (cognition, analysis) is – in the light of the assumptions presented here – a process always focused on the “journey” rather than the “destination”: in this sense Deleuze argued that sense remains something that is constantly created by us, and that this process – analogous to a chase scene in an action film or a brilliant deduction in a crime story – is constantly becoming increasingly important thanks to the material signifiants (such as colors, rhythm, or film-related experiences)<sup>50</sup>.

For cinema, as opposed to literature and theater – reduces the distance between a piece of work and a person – an actor – as it excludes a strong relationship with the text, in return highlighting the importance of the physical engagement in the plot. It corresponds with the category of the image (central for Deleuze as a film critic), which he took from Bergson: “Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of ‘images’. And by ‘image’ we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a *representation*, but less than that which the realist calls a *thing*”<sup>51</sup>. However, film treating literature in a “film-like” way allows literature to become “detextualized”: the literature that Rivette uses indeed reveals its materiality – it ceases to be only a code or a series of signs, becoming an agent of a kind, a material (even if “absent”) drive for the plot which continues to take place without its text-centric entanglement<sup>52</sup>; “corporality” reveals itself in the works which were seen as predominantly “textual” before<sup>53</sup>.

Ultimately it leads to the revelation of the reflexive materiality of theory: we do not argue that Rivette opted to simply portray a full theory, or that theory was created directly under the influence of New Wave cinema or other artistic creations and practices. Instead, we

<sup>48</sup>Deleuze, 43.

<sup>49</sup>Rivette said that for example in an interview he gave “Le Monde” in 1974, in Frappat, *Mise en scène*, 40. See also Kłys, *Narodziny filmu z ducha teatru*, 22. Questions of Rivette’s focus on the body and its performativity are well known in criticism, and so I will just give some examples of their problematization. Kłys’s paper is an excellent synthetic conceptualization of issues of interest here. See also Alain Ménil, *Miarka za miarkę. Teatr i kino u Jacques’a Rivette’a* [Measure for measure. Theater and cinema in Jacques Rivette], translated into Polish by Maria Żurowska, *Sekretne światy Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 159-175.

<sup>50</sup>Martin, *Wielki manipulator*, 60. Something slightly different takes place in the *Hunting*, in which we mostly deal with the signs of snark’s presence and its representation, but we never see it; however, the snark (although mostly present in imagination), does trouble the crew.

<sup>51</sup>Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929, VII.

<sup>52</sup>See Ménil, *Miarka za miarkę. Teatr i kino u Jacques’a Rivette’a*, 167. According to Ménil, the theater makes it impossible or limits that chance of the cinema, because – due to actors being “chained” to a given place, or even places” – it limits their mobility. See Ménil, 163.

<sup>53</sup>See *The Beautiful Troublemaker*, scrupulously analyzing the “characterics” of the protagonist’s body (played by Emmanuelle Béart).

discuss interdependences and analogies. That example – the analogy of Deleuze’s theory regarding the functional role of the lack of “meaning” (for Deleuze the absent snark constitutes a meaning in itself<sup>54</sup>) and structural plot holes, which for, say, phenomenology would most likely become places of “specification”, and yet impossible to specify due to the lack of fundamental source knowledge – shows that the cinema does not simply become a materialized play of idiomatic cinematic techniques; they have an analogous construction and technical characteristics. After all, they are based on a certain self-centered lack, rather than a purposeful one (first and foremost – on the initial lack of “meaning”, compensated by materiality and eventfulness), becoming a blueprint for a cognitive sense-creative way – at least in the case of *Out 1* – of “theorizing” not the film, but to the contrary – the cinematic, fictional characteristics of the theory. Viewed from this perspective, open-structure works continue to undulate<sup>55</sup>, they offer endless cognitive effort, analogous to the “incomplete” post-structural interpretation.

For Deleuze, the cinema is a new field encompassing pictures and signs which have to be produced by the philosophical theory within conceptual practice<sup>56</sup>. If we understand a work of art as a game of certain events with some meaning created on their surface, and theory (in line with its etymology) as a reflection which strives towards explanation, the cinematicity of theory “as a chase” becomes evident. Consequently, post-structural theory – it should be accepted without getting into other conditionings or limitations<sup>57</sup> – becomes equally exciting as watching a New Wave film in a given application: it offers an adventure of affective experience or detective-like investigation of subsequent elements of its construction, whose character leaves the audience with unanswerable, yet still inspiring questions.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>54</sup>Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, 40.

<sup>55</sup>Deleuze, *Les trois cercles de Rivette*, 47.

<sup>56</sup>Gilles Deleuze, *Kino* [Cinema], translated into Polish by Janusz Margański, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, 2008: 492.

<sup>57</sup>For example for mise-en-abyme Deleuze’s theory results in an entanglement in discourse levels, inevitably leading to various aporias, and repositioning of any “borders” and “playing at their boundaries”. See Deleuze, *Logika sensu*, 38-39, 42-43. To some extent, it is problematized by the author, who writes about the paradox of sterile doubling or dry repetition. Deleuze, 56.

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# KEYWORDS

JACQUES RIVETTE

theory of literature

**ABSTRACT:**

The article analyzes post-structural theoretical perspectives in analogies to the construction of films. According to Gilles Deleuze, supported by an interpretation of the works by Lewis Carroll, a functional lack is a key element of every system, as it activates and dynamizes that system, motivating the recipients to undertake cognitive activity. Hence fiction and related analyses and interpretations work according to the same rule – they are “a hunt for meaning”. This hypothesis is supplemented by an observation made on the basis of a New Wave film by Jacques Rivette, *Out 1*, regarding the reflexive “detextualization” and “materialization” of theory in the cinema.



*Honoré de Balzac*

Lewis Carroll

**Gilles Deleuze**

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# “The Cinematic Novel” and the Materiality of the Text:

Jan Brzękowski's *Bankructwo profesora  
Muellera* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy]

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Blaise Cendrars thus writes about the new art in *The ABCs of Cinema* (1926): “[t]he latest advancements in the exact sciences, the great war, the concept of relativity, political convulsions, all this foretells that we are on our way toward a new synthesis of the human spirit, toward a new humanity, and that a race of new men is going to appear. Their language will be the cinema.” He further added that “[t]he floodgates of the new language are open. The letters of the new primer jostle each other, innumerable. Everything becomes possible!”<sup>1</sup> Such a statement was characteristic of the atmosphere of the 1920s: it was believed that the development of cinema and the gradual development of a new language, which could compete with literature, were interrelated. Heated debates sometimes crossed the boundaries between analysis and prophecy, with critics and artists arguing about the decline of drama (replaced by script-like forms), the need to reform the novel, and the need to create a new poetry, one that would correspond to the goals of contemporary directors.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Blaise Cendrars, “The ABCs of Cinema”, in: S. MacKenzie (ed.), *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2014), 22.

<sup>2</sup> See: texts collected and edited by Marcin Giżycki in the anthology *Walka o film artystyczny w międzywojennej Polsce* [The fight for the artistic film in interwar Poland] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwa Naukowe, 1989), in particular: J. Kurek, *O filmie “artystycznym” i “stosowanym”* [The “artistic” and “applied” film] (pp. 138-140) oraz *Kino – zwycięstwo naszych oczu* [Cinema: The victory of our eyes] (pp. 137), A. Stern, *Uwagi o teatrze i kinie* [Remarks on theater and cinema] (pp. 82-85) and *Malarstwo a kino* [Painting and cinema] (113-115); T. Czyżewski, *Krajobraz w kinie* [Landscape in cinema] (p. 52).

According to contemporary enthusiasts, film – like a miraculous modern substance – transformed literature, advancing its break with traditional forms of expression and providing it with new possibilities. The history of these transformations has been described by scholars – they have drawn attention to a number of cinematic features that could be found in the literature of the 1920s and the 1930s. The list is long and includes, among others, abandoning the ballast of descriptiveness, narrative experiments, imitating film editing, and, finally, various literary allusions.<sup>3</sup> This led to the creation of the hybrid "cinematic novel:" a form that is difficult to define. As Steven G. Kellman writes in "The Cinematic Novel: Tracking a Concept," it developed concurrently with the art of cinematography: "'cinematic' does not mean the same thing in 1987 as it did in 1950, before wide-screen technology, as it did in 1940, before color became commonplace, as it did in 1925, before movies could talk, or as it did in 1900, before cameras became mobile."<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I shall focus on one of the possible relations between the literary text and the cinematic image, one which developed when the silent film was already in decline, namely Jan Brzękowski's *Bankructwo profesora Muellera (powieść sensacyjno-filmowa)* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy (a crime cinematic novel)]. The novel was published in 1932 by the Dom Książki Polskiej [Polish Book House] publishing house.<sup>5</sup> It was the most experimental, particularly in terms of visuality and typography, text in Polish interwar avant-garde prose; however, it did not attract the attention of contemporary writers.<sup>6</sup> Adam Ważyk, Jalu Kurek, Anatol Stern, Bruno Jasieński boldly attempted to create avant-garde prose; however, even though it may be a simplification, they focused primarily on stylistic and compositional experiments. Typographic innovations, unlike in poetry, were for the most part unaccounted for.

*Bankructwo profesora Muellera* was exceptional in this respect. A number of artists worked together on the visual form of the novel. The cover was designed by Henryk Stażewski. Sophie Taeuber-Arp's photographs were used as illustrations throughout the book and Brzękowski's portrait by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz was also reproduced in it. At the heart of the experiment was the typography: the layout referred to cinematic conventions but (as I shall explain later) it was by no means limited to them. To define its nature, let me draw on George Bornstein's *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Bornstein argues that "the literary text consists not only of words (its linguistic code) but also of the semantic features of its material instantiations (its bibliographic code). Such bibliographic codes might include cover design, page layout, or spacing, among other

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g.: Jan Nepomoucen Miller, "Dyktatura wzroku" [The rule of the eye], *Wiadomości Literackie* 1933, no. 17; Stefania Zahorska, "Co powieść zawdzięcza filmowi?" [What the novel owes to the film?], *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy* 1934, no. 29; Alina Madej, "Między filmem a literaturą. Szkic o powieści filmowej" [Between film and literature: On the cinematic novel] in "Film polski wobec innych sztuk" [Polish film and other arts], ed. Alicja Helman, Alina Madej (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1979); Maryla Hopfinger, *Kultura audiowizualna u progu XXI wieku* [Audiovisual culture at the turn of the 21st century] (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Steven G. Kellman, "The Cinematic Novel: Tracking a Concept", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33, no. 3 (1987): 471.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Brzękowski, *Bankructwo profesora Muellera (powieść sensacyjno-filmowa)* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy (a crime cinematic novel)] (Warsaw: Dom Książki Polskiej, 1932).

<sup>6</sup> See further: Aleksander Wójtowicz, *Cogito i "sejsmograf podświadomości". Proza Pierwszej Awangardy* [Cogito and the "seismograph of the subconscious": The prose of the First Avant-garde] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2010).

factors. They might also include the other contents of the book or periodical in which the work appears (...).” The American scholar reads these material features in the context of “aura;” even though Walter Benjamin claimed that it was absent in works that were created by means of mechanical reproduction, in the case of literature, “original mechanical reproductions can create their own aura” and it can be revealed in the material features of the text.<sup>7</sup> Such an interpretation of *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* is additionally justified by the fact that the book is a *rara avis* among avant-garde publications. Fifty years ago, Brzękowski wrote that copies of the book “can be found in Poland only at the National Library, and abroad – at the Polish Library in Paris.”<sup>8</sup> It is still true today (the book occasionally appears at antiquarian auctions; it is usually an expensive lot).

It should be emphasized that Brzękowski paid (perhaps the greatest) attention (among all avant-garde writers of the interwar period) to the visual form of the text. He had lived in Paris and had established close contacts with representatives of the local avant-garde, whom he asked to design his poetry collections. The cover of *Na katodze* (1929) was a reproduction of a gouache by Fernand Léger. A drawing by Hans Arp was reproduced on the cover of *W drugiej osobie* [In the second person] (1933). The collections *Zaciśnięte dookoła ust* [Clenched around the mouth] (1936) and *Spectacle métallique* (1937) published by “a.r.” were illustrated with collages by Max Ernst.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, all the books were designed and produced with great care in terms of the format, typographic layout, and lettering (supervised by, among others, Władysław Strzemiński). It can be said that they were created in a dialogue with the contemporary modern concepts of unique graphic design, the “new typography,” functional printing, and above all, avant-garde transactions between literature and the fine arts.<sup>10</sup>

The experiments in *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* were guided by similar notions. However, their nature changed, because while the attempts of the above-mentioned schools and movements were connected with the avant-garde *livre d'artiste*, Brzękowski in his prose referred to contemporary popular culture, as the subtitle “a crime cinematic novel” suggests. However, unlike many other contemporary authors, who focused mostly on sensational and adventurous storylines (as was the case, for example, with Jerzy Bandrowski and his *Po tęczowej obręczy. Film awanturniczy* [On the rainbow circle: A crime film] or Leo Belmont), the writer was not so much interested in the plot as the possibilities which open up at the intersection of avant-garde prose and cinema.

This was achieved in and through the “cinematic novel.” In *Psychoanalitik w podróży* [A travelling psychoanalyst] (1929), published three years earlier, designed in accordance with the principle of “formal heterogeneity,” one of the characters argued, in a metaliterary fashion, that: “Three hundred pages in the same format and style demonstrate that the author is not

<sup>7</sup> George Bornstein, *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu* [In Krakow and in Paris] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1963), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Joanna Hałaczkiwicz writes about this issue in “Jan Brzękowski i jego emigracyjne spotkania z piękną książką” [Jan Brzękowski and his emigration meetings with the beautiful book] [date of access: Jan. 10, 2021]: <https://jhalaczkiwicz.pl/jan-brzekowski-i-jego-emigracyjne-spotkania-z-piekna-ksiazka/>

<sup>10</sup> Paulina Kurc-Maj, “Nowe widzenie – język nowoczesnej typografii w międzywojennej Polsce” [New vision - the language of modern typography in interwar Poland], in *Maszyna do komunikacji. Wokół awangardowej idei nowej typografii* [Communication machine: Around the avant-garde concept of the new typography], ed. Paulina Kurc-Maj, Daniel Muzyczuk (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2015), 421-439.

creative when it comes to style. Worse, they indicate that the author is limited in his emotional perception, that he cannot see the connection between the psychic reality and the form. The so-called authorial style, unchanged and unchanging, opposes progress and the twentieth century."<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the respective chapters were written in different conventions: the *Künstlerroman*, the novel of manners, the travel novel and the detective novel. The last and the most experimental part was an attempt to create the "cinematic novel." It was characterized thus: "The cinematic novel, which is not synonymous with the script, is worth exploring. It allows for speed. The pace of life. It emphasizes the need for abbreviations, uniform directional tensions. The cinematic novel is delightfully technical. It separates feelings, speech and facts perceived by the senses. It separates certain wholes. Several plotlines may develop simultaneously because we can quickly move from place to place. It rejects the cult of details. It brings out the visual elements of the whole. And most of all: it produces a different way of approaching and producing concepts."<sup>12</sup>

"Bringing out the visual elements" could be achieved either by imitating film techniques or experimenting with page layout and typography. The former primarily related to creating a storyline on the basis of the most popular (quite literally – the most entertaining) mechanisms found in contemporary silent films. Brzękowski knew these conventions well. Indeed, unlike in the script of the abstract film *Kobieta i koła* [Woman and circles] (1931) written more or less at the same time,<sup>13</sup> he focused not so much on artistic experiments as on imitating the most recognizable narrative patterns. In practice, it looked thus:

(1) **At the inn**

(2) the professor was amazed by his brother's gluttony, again.

At home, he thought about it for a long time, surrounded by vaporous spirals of blue cigar smoke.

(3) **In the evening ...**

(4) He did not go to bed. With a gun in his pocket, he awaited midnight, or rather a secret march of ghosts dressed in white.

(5) **Then**

(6) a row of white figures came (...), the professor came out the house unnoticed and followed the ghosts from a short distance. Mysterious figures approached Mr. Westergreen's inn and, after opening the gate, they carried the crate to the shed next to the Boardinghouse. (...)

(7) **At home**

(8) He thinks about it for a long time. Suddenly he gets up and, walking around the room, happily repeats:

- Of course. Yes. Certainly. I must be right.

He flips through the book. Finally, he finds it. He points to it with his finger: - - Yes.

(9) **TOMORROW**

(10) the professor arrived earlier than usual at Mr. Westergreen's inn.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Jan Brzękowski, *Psychoanalityk w podróży* [A travelling psychoanalyst] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo F. Hoesicka, 1929), 70-71.

<sup>12</sup>Brzękowski, 71.

<sup>13</sup>Jan Brzękowski, "Kobieta i koła" [Woman and circles], *Linia 1* (1931).

<sup>14</sup>Brzękowski, *Bankructwo*, 38-9. This and subsequent passages from *Bankructwo* were translated by M.O.

The typographic layout differed from contemporary conventions. Cinematic inspirations were of a twofold nature: Brzękowski imitated both film editing and intertitles. The former points to the widely discussed relationships between the literary and the cinematic modes of depiction, which were already considered alike at the time. In Brzękowski's "cinematic novel," such an approach manifests itself in the form of short paragraphs, scenes, that were connected in keeping with the principles which also governed silent films.

A potential key to describing this technique is Christian Metz's concept of the "great syntagmatic of film narration" (*la grande syntagmatique du film narratif*).<sup>15</sup> Metz wished to find a code that would define the framework for constructing a cinematic narrative. He analyzed works from the classical period of cinema and focused on the mechanisms of constructing a storyline. This allowed him to define the basic unit of film – the "autonomous syntagma" – and then distinguish its types, thus creating a systematic "palette of all forms of representing temporal relations in a feature film, from among which the director can choose at their leisure."<sup>16</sup> Metz's theory was criticized, among other reasons, because it focused on images and ignored sound.<sup>17</sup> However, what was considered a drawback in film studies may, somewhat paradoxically, be considered a considerable asset in the analysis of the "cinematic" novel. The "great syntagmatic" focuses on the semantic mechanisms governing the juxtaposition of images, i.e. on a technique developed in silent films, to whose unique nature Brzękowski referred.

This, in turn, translated into fragmentation and unique layout: the elements that imitate the intertitles are clearly marked in bold (or capitalized) and fragmented, so that the text is divided into lines (paragraphs marked with odd numbers). They were meant to render the represented events more coherent by locating them in time and space, which was common in the "silent" years, when "movement-image" (Deleuze) was dominant.<sup>18</sup> Respectively, longer sequences, in accordance with the typology proposed by Metz, can be described as literary equivalents: scenes (*une scène*), where space-time unity is achieved (paragraphs 8 and 10); episodic sequences (*une séquence par episode*), which summarize events to come (paragraphs 2 and 4); and ordinary sequences (*une séquence ordinaire*), where episodes irrelevant to the plot are omitted (paragraph 6). Moreover, the novel also experimented with simultaneous composition, modeled on D. W. Griffith's parallel montage, which in Metz's typology corresponds to an alternating syntagma (*une syntagme alternant*). The word "meanwhile" (in bold and in a separate line), which connects two adjacent paragraphs, is an equivalent an alternating syntagma.

Such solutions influenced the typography. Brzękowski's experiments with film techniques were not limited to the visual sphere and visualization in general. They also included the

<sup>15</sup>Christian Metz, *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, vol. 1 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968), 212-234.

<sup>16</sup>Alicja Helman, Jacek Ostaszewski, *Historia myśli filmowej* [The history of film studies] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo słowo/ obraz terytoria, 2007), 202. See also: Zbigniew Czeczot-Gawrak, *Współczesna francuska teoria filmu* [Contemporary French film theory] (Warsaw: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich - Wydawnictwo PAN, 1982), 264-295.

<sup>17</sup>In later works, Metz considered it to be one of many cinematic codes (*des codes cinématographiques*). See: Christian Metz, *Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Albatros, 1971), 143-4.

<sup>18</sup>Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The movement-image, Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 140-180.

use of intertitles, which were at times rather elaborate, and quoting, *in extenso*, entire letters and press articles. Such experiments were characteristic of modern avant-garde prose writers, who believed that heterogeneous composition would help them avoid the limitations of realistic prose. However, in Brzękowski's novel, they were additionally "filtered through" a cinematic way of seeing.

This affected the materiality of the text. From today's perspective, this is one of the most interesting aspects of Brzękowski's experiments, which were conducted in the greater context of avant-garde experiments with the visual form of literary text. The "cinematic novel" was heading in a direction similar to the futuristic "words-in-freedom" and Apollinaire's calligrammes, but it used cinematic means of expression. They inspired the use of a number of typographic solutions, including different typefaces, fonts, characters. There were many of them indeed and they were often used interchangeably. For example, in the opening pages of the novel (Fig. 1, p. 16), the layout was neither vertical, horizontal, nor diagonal. The page resembled a poetical collage. Different fonts (both lowercase and uppercase) and typefaces (sans serif, sans-serif bold, and serif Excelsior, first introduced in 1931) were used.<sup>19</sup>

These typefaces were used throughout the entire novel. Such typography was quite a challenge, so we cannot really tell whether the final result was what the writer intended. For example, let us examine the paragraphs which imitate intertitles. At the beginning of the novel, capitalized Excelsior font was used (Fig. 1, p. 17). The same font was also used in a rectangular frame, imitating an inscription on a suitcase. Subsequently, however, uppercase and lowercase sans-serif font was used, which rendered the layout of the page very complex (judging by contemporary publishing standards). In general, Brzękowski probably wished to use the Excelsior typeface as his "basic" typeface and use the uppercase Excelsior or bold sans-serif typeface (both lowercase and uppercase letters) for intertitles. We cannot tell whether so many different typefaces were used because the author was not consistent or because some changes were introduced by the typesetter. Moreover, and this is yet another possibility, perhaps Brzękowski was not so much looking for consistency but testing new possibilities.

The author played with publishing conventions on the page. Such experiments were part and parcel of avant-garde literature, as evidenced by a long list of experimental works, especially by Polish futurists and, later, by artists from the "Nowa Sztuka" [New Art] circles and Polish constructivists. As printing techniques and the Polish school of graphic design developed, these artistic experiments became even more interesting, as exemplified by Julian Przyboś's *sponad [over]* (1930), designed by Strzemiński, or Brzękowski's works. To draw on Bornstein's distinction between the "linguistic code" and the "bibliographic code," it can be said that in Polish avant-garde texts the "linguistic code" was more innovative than the "bibliographic code." However, Brzękowski's novel differed in that respect. In terms of its plot and structure, it was an adventure/crime/detective novel. What was innovative was the (not always consistent) imitation of filming techniques and experiments related to the materiality of the text. Thus, typefaces, fonts, and letters became the elements of a visual composition, which meant to transgress contemporary publishing conventions. Importantly, not only the writer but also

<sup>19</sup>Alexander Lawson, *Anatomy of a Typeface* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990), 282.

the typesetters had a say in the novel's final form. The success of the project was, quite literally, in their hands. It can therefore be said that the novel was a product of collective authorship, because the professional typesetter played an important role in the whole process.

Let me comment on one more important aspect of the typography in the novel. It was the use of round brackets in which the narrator commented on the plot, emphasizing the schematic nature of events, the shortcomings of the storyline and the naivety of the characters. Thus, the text in brackets was metafictional in nature, drawing attention to the pastiche-like character of the whole. The narrator narrated the story and questioned it, using ironic remarks or literary allusions: "Larsen Ulupin thinks about how he fell in love with the 17-year-old Elly Larsen for the first time in his life (The reader may find similar psychological states in T. Mann's *Tonio Kröger*)."<sup>20</sup> At times, multi-level structures were used, where one comment triggered another:

### **The road to India**

leads through Egypt.

You know: Thebes, the Sphinx, the Pyramids, the curse of the pharaohs, the mummies...

(The author refrains from describing the country. It is not because he has never been to Egypt, for this would make his description even better. (Evidence: the terrible description of the Canary Islands and Marseilles, which the author has visited). It is to speed up the erotic and dramatic plot and render it more exciting. If you want to experience the ambient of Egypt and love under the pyramids, my dear Reader, you should go to the cinema and see "Water of the Nile" or "Revenge of the mummy from the 14th dynasty" or something like that).<sup>21</sup>

The text in the brackets was in fact ironic a meta-comment on the plot of the novel. The narrator's self-referential comments clearly suggested that the novel was a joke: such meta-referentiality was often found in the works of contemporary avant-garde writers. *L'esprit ludique* (playful ingenuity),<sup>22</sup> which manifested itself in the use of pastiche and fascination with popular culture (which often made its way, transformed and altered, into avant-garde texts), was one of the characteristics of the avant-garde.

The very first pages of the novel make it clear that it is a pastiche. Their design is modeled on popular advertisements which inform the reader about the author and the work. Such publications were very popular at the time: "in cinemas in the 'silent' years, booklets were sometimes sold; apart from the detailed plan of the evening, they also featured descriptions of the plot of the movie and often included photos."<sup>23</sup> *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* made

<sup>20</sup>Brzękowski, *Bankructwo*, 97.

<sup>21</sup>Brzękowski, 72.

<sup>22</sup>A. Marino, "L'art et l'esprit ludique" in: *Les avant-gardes littéraires au Xxe siècle*, vol. 2, *Théorie*, publié par le Centre d'Étude des Avant-gardes Littéraires de l'Université de Bruxelles; sous la direction de Jean Weisgerber (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 753.

<sup>23</sup>Janusz Dunin, *Rozwój cech wydawniczych polskiej książki literackiej XIX i XX wieku* [The development of publishing features of *livre d'artiste* of the 19th and 20th centuries in Poland] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2018), 191.



reference to such ephemeral publications. The author's face (cut out of a photograph taken in 1930) appeared first (p. 2),<sup>24</sup> The words "JAN BRZĘKOWSKI" (3) "has the honor to present" (5), the title of the novel with information about the publisher (7), and a list of the four most important "characters" (8) followed. Then, the reader could see the portraits of these characters (pp. 8-11; Fig. 2), including the portrait of Brzękowski made by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (the painting was lost during the war)<sup>25</sup> and three photographs of the writer taken by Sophie Taeubert-Arp. "Photographs of Dr Strumień, Prince Larsen Ulupin and Ingeborg Held (...) were taken by Sophie Taeuber-Arp; she also made Ingeborg Held's hat," wrote Brzękowski in his post-war memoirs.<sup>26</sup> The photo session, cross-dressing and Chaplinesque stylization reflected well the specific atmosphere of the Parisian international avant-garde. It seems that today these photographs are more than just illustrations. Over the years, they have gained additional value not only as a testament to the writer's artistic affiliations but also the only material documentation of a lost portrait by Witkacy.

Importantly, a photomontage made by Henryk Stażewski is reproduced on the cover.<sup>27</sup> It refers in part to the convention indicated in the subtitle: photographs of two people, a plane and a map (attention should also be paid to the hand-drawn letters, clearly referring to the Futura typeface designed by Paul Renner) are clearly visible. However, the photomontage mostly makes use of the photographs of crowds. In one photograph, the crowd is standing in a long geometric line which breaks at some point. In the other photograph, the crowd is cropped so that only a small part of it is visible. This corresponds to the theme of the novel, namely anthropophagy and global riots and revolts caused by the operation of a company established by the title character. Professor Mueller sold canned meat of unknown origin. The food was highly addictive, which led to the suspicion that it was made of human flesh. The novel drew on absurd and playful stories by Apollinaire and Aleksander Wat but also commented on the actual social problems caused by the Great Depression. Although Brzękowski's novel encoded it in the form of the "cinematic novel", with some elements of crime drama, the vision of societies devouring each other and torn apart by atavistic instincts was reminiscent of contemporary cultural fears.<sup>28</sup>

The "cinematic novel" was the most radical experiment with the materiality of the text in the history of avant-garde prose. It was not continued, however, because in his next novel, Brzękowski returned to more traditional forms of expression. His ideas were not taken up by other avant-garde artists: at that time, they were gradually turning to social themes, and thus paying more attention to facts and reportage than typographic experiments. Moreover, the writers who made their debuts in the 1930s, the "Gomborowicz generation," were not interested in avant-garde innovations.

<sup>24</sup>The photograph was reproduced in *W Krakowie i w Paryżu*.

<sup>25</sup>Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu*, 49.

<sup>26</sup>Brzękowski, 230.

<sup>27</sup>Jan Straus, *Cięcie. Fotomontaż na okładkach w międzywojennej Polsce* [Cut: Photomontage on book and magazine covers in interwar Poland] (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie 40 000 Malarzy, 2014), 35.

<sup>28</sup>In the following years, Brzękowski returned to "engaged" themes, writing a poem devoted to the expulsion of Polish miners from France (*Leforest*) and the novel *24 kochanków Perdity Loost* [24 lovers of Perdita Loost] (1939), in which the title character is killed in street riots.

In a broader perspective, what made *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* so innovative, i.e. the silent cinema code, proved to be a drawback. The novel was written at a turning point in the history of cinematography. The “talkies,” which appeared a few years later, changed the forms of cinematic expression, thus irreversibly rendering obsolete the means of expression to which Brzękowski referred. Indeed, Brzękowski consistently minimized his use of dialogue – conversations between the characters were laconic and most often presented in a typographic layout reminiscent of intertitles – which demonstrates just how obsolete the text must have read after some time. Indeed, already in the 1930s, “cinematic” prose often used dialogues, adapting more and more to the convention of a script.

Paradoxically, the “cinematic novel” did not give rise to cinematic but typographic and visual experiments, which exposed the materiality of the text. Brzękowski attempted to transfer contemporary cinematic techniques into literature. Although they were somewhat outdated – because they referred to forms that were ousted with the development of the “talkies” – they shaped the novel’s “bibliographic code.” They determined the typographic layout, the graphic design, and the choice of illustrations, i.e. the material aspects of the novel which determine its “aura.” Ultimately, the novel was created (and perhaps conceived) by typesetters, Taeuber-Arp (photos), Witkacy (portrait) Stażewski (photomontage). Indeed, *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* was (let us point to this analogy in the end), like the films that were being made at the time, a collaborative endeavor: the atelier was replaced by the workshop of a graphic designer and a typesetter.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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# KEYWORDS

avant-garde

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## ABSTRACT:

The article analyzes Jan Brzękowski's cinematic novel *Bankructwo profesora Muellera* [Professor Mueller's Bankruptcy] from the perspective of avant-garde experiments with novelistic conventions. It demonstrates how the imitation of silent film forms was translated into the "bibliographic code" (G. Bornstein), giving rise to an innovative typographic layout, thanks to which the materiality of the text (typographic composition, different typefaces, fonts, and letters) became one of the key aspects of the work. Moreover, the article draws attention to graphic design created by other artists (Witkacy, S. Taeuber-Arp, H. Stażewski).

## THE MATERIALITY OF THE TEXT

### TYPOGRAPHY

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# Between History and (Distorted) Memory.

## Hidden Monograms of the Past in *The King of Two Sicilies* by Andrzej Kuśniewicz

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*The King of Two Sicilies* (1970), alongside *Lessons in a Dead Language* (1977), is perhaps the most widely known and most appreciated (also in terms of reception outside of Poland) novel by Andrzej Kuśniewicz. These two widely commented works have often been described as part of the trend in Polish literature which focuses on the exploration of the irretrievably lost world of Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungary, especially during its slow decay. In this sense, they are thematically and structurally similar to the works by Piotr Wojciechowski or Andrzej Stojowski. Therefore, a statement made by Kazimierz Wyka seems applicable in this context; he claimed that Kuśniewicz, with the use of a fluent narrative and a considerate amount of nostalgia, wrote two I.R. ballad-novels picturing Austria-Hungary as a beautiful, multicultural mosaic<sup>1</sup>. However, it is hard to accept such an interpretation of these novels. Neither the conservation of I.R-ish myth<sup>2</sup> nor apology of the 'dead kingdom' (or its 'resurrection'<sup>3</sup>) could have been the writer's purpose. Leaving aside the fact that it would hardly be possible, the stake here is much higher. These writings seek to capture a world at the very moment of it

<sup>1</sup> Kazimierz Wyka, 'C.K. ballado-powieści' [I.R. ballad-novels], in *Nowe i dawne wędrówki po tematach* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 284–96.

<sup>2</sup> See Ewa Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej* [Austria Felix: about the myth of Galicia in Polish contemporary prose] (Poznań: Bene Nati, 1997); Alois Woldan, *Mit Austrii w literaturze polskiej* [The myth of Austria in Polish literature], trans. into Polish by Krzysztof Jachimczak and Ryszard Wojnakowski (Kraków: MCK, 2002); Claudio Magris, *Mit habsburski w literaturze austriackiej moderny* [The Habsburg myth in Austrian modernist literature], trans. into Polish by Joanna Ugniewska and Elżbieta Jogała (Kraków – Budapest – Syrakuzy: Austeria, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> See Barbara Kazimierczyk, *Wskrzeszanie umarłych królestw* [Resurrection of dead kingdoms] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1982).

dying; to seize the decay of an epoch of the 'long' 19th century<sup>4</sup>, resembling its own, faded *images d'Épinal*. Austro-Hungary, with its poses, grimaces and props, is in fact ironically depicted by Kuśniewicz, with a chronological distance that is always carefully marked:

We are in the era of the late Art Nouveau, of fading modernism; it might be therefore be worthwhile to mention a few books in the glass-fronted mahogany bookcase that in style is closer to Maria Theresa than to Biedermeier. [...] the latest editions of the dramas of Frank Wedekind; several issues of the magazine *Die Fackel*; *Die Farben* by Hoffmannsthal; *The White Manor* by Hermann Bang [...]<sup>5</sup>

Kuśniewicz defies the conventions of the reality effect, regularly reassuring the reader that the world depicted is artificial, contractual, thus suggesting its similarity in this respect to the "factual" Austro-Hungary. Hence, it seems accurate to suggest that the main character of *The King of Two Sicilies*, Emil R., is a metacharacter<sup>6</sup> (similarly to Kiekeritz from *Lessons in a Dead Language* he is rather a metonymy of the inglorious death of the epoch<sup>7</sup>), while the novel itself bears the hallmarks of a pastiche and is certainly characterized by a multitude of intertextual references. Besides the motifs taken from such masterpieces as *The Man Without Qualities*, *Radetsky March*<sup>8</sup> or *Sól ziemi* (*Salt of the Earth*), Kuśniewicz was inspired by the hyperaesthetic prose and dramas written by such prized writers of the Young Poland period as Hermann Bang (the preface to the Polish edition of *Biały dwór* [*The White Manor*] was written by Stanisław Przybyszewski himself) and Frank Wedekind. It is not without reason that Emil finds their books on the shelves of his family home.

Like *Lessons in a Dead Language*, when analyzed from a structuralist perspective *The King of Two Sicilies* appears to be a fascinating collection of quotes<sup>9</sup>, portraits and literary figures. In taking this into account, however, we should not assume that its meaning is limited to an archive of cultural codes, hardly alive, somehow postmodern, and created with an ironic distance. It is simply a fragment of a much wider reflection on the dialectics of the historical apathy and the process of memory aimed at reworking both particular experiences and life itself in general. The latter provokes questions about the function of personal aspects of the experiences of specific actors on the stage of

<sup>4</sup> In the *Puzzles of Memory* Kuśniewicz says: 'For me the 19th century ended in 1918. It was the time of a breakthrough in both arts and politics. It was the time when the biggest number of events happened: the revolution in Russia, disintegration of i.r monarchy (which was the price it paid for the war), the emergence of new states, regaining independence by several nations'. Szczesniak Grażyna and Kuśniewicz Andrzej, *Puzzle pamięci. Z A. Kuśniewiczem w marcu i kwietniu 1991 rozmawiała G. Szczesniak* (Kraków: Eureka, 1992), 51. The following quotations and references to the novel will be located by PM acronym and appropriate page number.

<sup>5</sup> Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *The King of the Two Sicilies*, trans. Celina Wieniewska (New York – London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 17. The following quotations and references to the novel will be located by KTS acronym and appropriate page number.

<sup>6</sup> Ewa Wiegandt, *Andrzeja Kuśniewicza mit Androgyne* [Andrzej Kuśniewicz's myth of Androgyne], in Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*.

<sup>7</sup> Krzysztof Rutkowski writes about Kiekeritz's typicality in one of the most insightful analyses of *Lekcja martwego języka* [Lesson in a dead language]: Krzysztof Rutkowski, 'Martwy język', in *Ani było, ani jest: szkice literackie* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1984), 49–52.

<sup>8</sup> Dirk Uffelman, "Lekcja martwego języka" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza i "Marsz Radetzky'ego" Josepha Rotha. Próba paraleli [Lesson in a dead language by Andrzej Kuśniewicz and The Radetzsky march by Joseph Roth. Parallel attempt], in *Kresy. Syberia. Literatura. Doświadczenia dialogu i uniwersalizmu*, ed. Eugeniusz Czaplewicz and Edward Kasperski (Warszawa: TRIO, 1995), 135–49. Below, I try to show that there are also parallels between *The King of Two Sicilies* and Roth's novel.

<sup>9</sup> See Elżbieta Dutka, 'Lekcje i kolekcje. O "Lekcji martwego języka" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Lessons and collections. About Lesson in a dead language by Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Proza polska XX wieku: przeglądy i interpretacje*, ed. Marian Kisiel and Grażyna Maroszczyk, vol. 1 (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2005), 69–85.

history (no matter if they recognize themselves as such or push this into their subconscious) in a synthesis of the epoch's experience provided by the book. It is created (and maintained) in a narrative whose goal is less to resist the disintegration of life itself than to enhance the distance between its particular, spatio-temporally conditioned forms, thus turning them into something akin to a display at a museum exhibition. The subject of Kuśniewicz's prose seems to carry on (though perhaps on a very deep level of psychological topology) an unequal fight to preserve a vivid part of its very own identity which cannot be reduced to an allegoristic ornament. The question I want to discuss in this paper is: does this subject freeze entirely in the manner of this narrative or are there dimensions of its existence which escape a historical macro-perspective and, at the same time, as artifacts of disturbed memory, remain inaccessible to itself, to the narrative's 'I'? In answering this question, I will refer to the ideas of Siegfried Kracauer, Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham. I will also try to prove that *The King of Two Sicilies* can be read as a meditation on (post)memory and a haunting of sorts, which reveal the thanatical lining of *the belle époque*. I will also analyze the work's narrative structure, as it carries some elements characteristic of cinematic ways of presenting diegetic reality.

★

Researchers of Kuśniewicz's prose show a keen interest in the opening sequence of the novel, which consists of four paragraphs, each of which is an attempt at a different – in terms of style, theme, and perspective – beginning for the narrative. This technique has its own meaning for the world presented in the book, as it marks the point of intersection of the four main themes of the story's plot: the history of the R. family (including the novel's main character Emil R.); very first hours and days of World War I; a chronicle of the events that took place in the town of Fehértéplom (Bila Tserkva); the murder of a Romany woman, Marika Huban, which is investigated in the story<sup>10</sup>. The technique is also crucial for establishing the work's extra-diegetic order as it immediately confirms the relevance of the metaliterary or even metanarrative component of the novel. It also prefigures later experiments with literary conventions and plays with cultural clichés depicting a specific spacetime (in the preface to the French edition of the novel Piotr Rawicz writes about 'secondary clichés'<sup>11</sup>). As Julita Wiktoria-Zapała states, the four beginnings of *The King of Two Sicilies*

[...] can be interpreted as a manifestation of cultural memory, consisting in this case in the parodic use of four varieties of a novel intertwining in the text. Such treatment of the multiplied incipit leads to the perception of the novel's characters as products of literary convention<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Coates suggests that 'the initial instead of the surname being an advance signal of the crime [...] and underlines the typicality of the main protagonist Paul Coates, 'Hofmannsthal and Kuśniewicz: The Soldier-Aesthetes of the Austro-Hungarian Army', in *The Double and the Other. Identity as Ideology in Post-Romantic Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 140. Coates is referring to the murder of Romany woman Marika Huban, which may have been perpetrated by Emil, although Kuśniewicz decides to leave only circumstantial evidence in this case, not deciding whether the main character is or is not guilty. The plot of this crime requires a separate study; here only, slightly ahead of further findings, we can say that Marika's death is symbolic in the structure of the text and is both a repetition and a reverse of the forbidden, secret desire that Emil harbors for Lieschen. See interpretation by Kazimierz Bartoszyński, 'Ironia i egzystencja. Uwagi o "Królu Obojga Sycylii" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza', *Teksty Drugie*, no. 1–2 (2006): 253–69.

<sup>11</sup>Rawicz Piotr, 'Préface', in *Le Roi des Deux-Siciles*, by Andrzej Kuśniewicz, trans. Christophe Jezewski and François-Xavier Jaujard (Paris: Albin Michel, 1978), 20.

<sup>12</sup>Wiktorska-Zapała Julita, 'Między wspomnieniem a fantazją: sposoby ocalenia podmiotowości w powieściach Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Between memory and fantasy: ways to save subjectivity in Andrzej Kuśniewicz's novels], *Sztuka i Filozofia*, no. 20 (2001): 145.



The above-mentioned statement is quite similar to some of the concepts of literary postmodernism, according to which the works written in that trend are (at least partially) ‘a commentary on the aesthetic history of whatever genre it adopts’<sup>13</sup>.

The novel by Kuśniewicz can thus be read as a statement on the conditions and orders governing the construction of literary depictions of the past, which are situated in a dynamic relation between (distorted) memory, understood as a product of intra-subject processes of shifting and overlapping, often motivated by affects, and a panorama of inter-subjective processes that tend to shape the subject rather than be created by it. It seems that not only reflection on what is singular (and what structures this singularity is inserted into) is important for Kuśniewicz; he also wants to consider the way in which the past is revealed in a contemporality – as a phenomenon with its own meaning, part of the time stream devoid of any essential hermeneutic property or as a mystery that calls for the exploration of one’s or foreign past. *The King of Two Sicilies* can be called (as Linda Hutcheon calls it) a “historiographical metanovel” which uses intertextuality and parody as a mean to expose or dismantle rhetorical orders of representations of the past<sup>14</sup>. Like E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime*,<sup>15</sup> evoked by Hutcheon, Kuśniewicz negates the objectivity of historiographical representations. With the use of fluent, structurally cinematic narrative (I will return to this issue in a moment), he undermines the hierarchy of the events and blurs the difference between facts and fictional speculation. This is why a ‘methodological’ commentary follows the four openings of the novel. It is somehow ironic, as it suggests the integrity of the past, which is yet freely supplemented by the author:

These facts appear to be logically unconnected and surely not interdependent. Nonetheless, each of them occurred at a strictly defined time, and therefore has been lastingly preserved. Nothing can be changed that happened in the past, nothing can be erased or left out. The past is indivisible. It is possible, perhaps, though there is no proof of this, that the absence of any element might have affected the course of future events in the public or private sphere. This assumption is not as absurd as it seems. What is or is not important is relative (KTS 4)

[...]

We repeat: all these facts, which are of different objective significance, yet subjectively important and therefore of equal weight, form an inseparable whole from which nothing can be omitted, because each component is crucial. However (although this might strike some as strange and even shocking) the demise of His Imperial and Royal Highness on June 28, and the death of the young gypsy girl Marika Huban precisely a month later, on July 28, 1914, will be equally important. Such a trivial occurrence as the leap of a dog from the door of a gypsy shack toward the dust-covered acacia bushes in which something suspect had moved, and the rustle of a laburnum twig that exercised an indefinable influence on the thinking of Emil R. – everything counts, everything at a given moment is extremely important for someone, therefore nothing can be excluded or dismissed (KTS 9-10)

<sup>13</sup>Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in the Age of Inflation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985), 44.

<sup>14</sup>Linda Hutcheon, ‘Historiographic Metafiction. Parody and the Intertextuality of History’, in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, ed. Patrick O’Donnell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3–32.

<sup>15</sup>Edgar Lawrence Doctorow, *Ragtime* (New York: Modern Library, 1997).

Kuśniewicz wants to present the events outside of a cause-and-effect sequence, and at the same time, resigns from the assumption that each element of the past has a meaning clearly established from a contemporary perspective. Instead, he establishes the horizon of a panoramic, complex 'presence' – sensual, often superfluous – focused on registering multiple textures of life in a given epoch. By describing only short periods of time, the writer shows their richness and offers us a reflection on the coherency of the objects and phenomena appearing in them<sup>16</sup>. His approach can be thus associated with the works of such researchers of 'presence' as Eelco Runia<sup>17</sup> and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, the author of a brilliant mosaic book about the year 1926 – *In 1926. Living on the Edge of Time*<sup>18</sup>. In a conversation with Zbigniew Taranienko, Kuśniewicz states that:

It is extremely easy for me [...] to put myself in such a situation as if I lived in the 18th century. Or even in the 17th century. I can imagine it perfectly. [...] It is connected with everything that was in that era, with what clothes were worn, what perfumes were used and what the furniture was. I grew out of this very story at a different time. Now it seems to be less so, because many traces of the past were destroyed by the war. Objects made a story, not only based on facts, a very specific extension of the previous generation<sup>19</sup>.

Taking into account all the findings mentioned above, we can assume that in *The King of Two Sicilies* two methods of constructing a fictional world compete with one another: a simultaneous, quite spontaneous flux<sup>20</sup> of events (Kuśniewicz himself speaks of a 'stream of parallelism'<sup>21</sup>) with the author portraying himself as a textual *deus otiosus*<sup>22</sup>, not interfering with the world he created,<sup>23</sup> and (this is the second method) anachrony in which the author is a supervisor-allegorist projecting a network between pieces of a dying world and examining not the life itself but its forms or, to evoke a distinction provided by Walter Benjamin, not a cosmos but a library<sup>24</sup>. If we remove any part of the composition created that way, then

the whole film now in incessant movement would stop and freeze. We would behold a kind of film in which life has been trapped; persons in motion would stop with one leg in the air, with a piece of choco-

<sup>16</sup>For this purpose Kuśniewicz uses the slightly less fortunate image of a whirlpool of water in the bathtub drain (KTS 11). See analysis of the problem of 'random non-randomness' of the chaos of events – Maria Medecka, 'Efekt motyla a dekonstrukcja formy powieściowej w prozie Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [The butterfly effect and the deconstruction of the novel form in the prose of Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Fabularność i dekonstrukcja*, ed. Maria Woźniakiewicz-Dziadosz (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 1998), 63–84.

<sup>17</sup>Eelco Runia, 'Presence', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00346.x>.

<sup>18</sup>Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926. Living on the Edge of Time* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 1997). See in particular *User's Manual* (IX–XVI). Among Polish authors, Tomasz Mizerkiewicz is probably the most willing to use Gumbrecht's conceptualization of 'presence' – See Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, *Po tamtej stronie tekstów: literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności* [On the other side of the texts: Polish literature and the modern culture of presence] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013).

<sup>19</sup>Zbigniew Taranienko, 'Odbicie. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Kuśniewiczem' [Reflection. An interview with Andrzej Kuśniewicz], in *Rozmowy z pisarzami* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1986), 469.

<sup>20</sup>See Krzysztof Pacewicz, *Fluks. Wspólnota płynów ustrojowych* [Flux. The community of body fluids] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2017).

<sup>21</sup>Taranienko, 463.

<sup>22</sup>See Agata Bielik-Robson, 'Deus otiosus: ślad, widmo, karzeł' [Deus otiosus: trail, specter, dwarf], in *Deus otiosus. Nowoczesność w perspektywie postsekularnej*, ed. Agata Bielik-Robson and Maciej A. Sosnowski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2013), 5–39.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Gorgie Gospodinow's concept of a 'natural novel', which I write about in Antoni Zając, 'Minotaur w piwnicy' [Minotaur in the basement], *Literatura na Świecie*, no. 5–6 (2020): 361–62.

<sup>24</sup>Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London ; New York: Verso, 2003). Benjamin's work deals with the relationship between the Renaissance (exploring the cosmos) and the Baroque (studying libraries).

late cake impaled on a fork, or carried to an already opened mouth but never ingested. The cream dripping from the fork would hang in the air. The mouth would remain dead, absurdly open forever (KTS 10)

It is therefore symptomatic that Kuśniewicz writes about cinematic art, because his novels seem to imitate construction techniques often used in cinema. This is the reason for constant changes between close-ups and wide angles, as well as the effort to present multiple themes simultaneously or through the prism of visibility, manifested by the richness of very detailed descriptions. About this specific aspect of Kuśniewicz's works Paul Coates writes interestingly:

The hermetically closed nature of the past lends Kusniewicz's relation to it something of the air of a viewer's relation to a film [...]. In both novels [*The King of Two Sicilies* and *Lessons in a Dead Language* – A.Z.] characters are shown watching others through a telescope: viewing them in the long shot with which the present views the unattainable past. [...] The combination of a cinematically plastic image of the surfaces of the past, which are fetishised much like the props in a period drama, with the incomprehensibility of the people who move among them, is an ironic one. In many respects, Kusniewicz's novels resemble descriptions of scenes in a film. Or rather, they are films, translated into the alternative medium of literature<sup>25</sup>.

The past, presented from a 'telescopic' distance, is set in decorations whose conventionality is clearly highlighted; the American scholar is right when he points out the fetishistic character of the epoch's props, which are often presented in the foreground. Yet it is the ironic superconsciousness producing the discussed dialectics – between efforts to transfer the past into the present (reader's) time and retrospective research on the world, carried out with the use of quotations of its dead aspects or, alternatively, functioning in the form of *Nachleben*<sup>26</sup> phenomena – which ensures us that we are not dealing with a so-called antiquarian novel<sup>27</sup>: 'We are still in the era of the dying Art Nouveau, so we can afford a certain exaggeration in feelings and definitions, a rather sentimental immodesty', Kuśniewicz writes (KTS 123) The significant element of *The King of Two Sicilies* is its vividly rococo micromegalism which transforms ornament from a supplement into a guiding principle of the world presented in the book. Because of this "They lose their dimension and get lost in the miniature world of ornaments and seashells"<sup>28</sup>, thus constituting perhaps little more than the pars pro toto of the past.

Let us return, however, to Coates' intriguing vision of the novel-as-film and try to treat it as a perfectly legitimate conceptualization of the relationship between the author, the images of the past they create, and the meaning that they gives to what is surplus, props, creating decorations, and at the same time coming to the fore. It seems that Kuśniewicz's prose is

<sup>25</sup>Coates, 'Hofmannsthal and Kuśniewicz: The Soldier-Aesthetes of the Austro-Hungarian Army', 144.

<sup>26</sup>*Nachleben* is a term used by Aby Warburg that can be translated as "after-life" or "survival" As Paweł Mościcki writes, *Nachleben* is 'a kind of fossil that experiences the change of the epoch, but only in a changed form, enlivens the present not through a triumphant return to earlier patterns, but rather through a relapse of repressed archaism, a symptom of a past, suppressed time' – Paweł Mościcki, 'Seismografy przewrotu. Gesty rewolucyjne jako Pathosformeln' [Seismographs of the revolution. Revolutionary gestures as Pathosformeln], *Konteksty*, no. 2–3 (2011): 163.

<sup>27</sup>This is the name used by Ewa Wiegandt to describe Andrzej Stojowski's novels like *Chłopiec na kucu* [The Boy on a Pony] – Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*, 141.

<sup>28</sup>Jan Białostocki, 'Rokoko: ornament, styl i postawa' [Rococo: ornament, style and attitude], in *Refleksje i syntezy ze świata sztuki* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 170. From this text I also take the concept of micromegalism by Hermann Bauer.

characterized by features interestingly similar to those that are to constitute the specificity of the film medium, in line with the approach presented in the classic *Theory of Film* by Siegfried Kracauer<sup>29</sup>.

As Adam Lipszyc writes, according to the German theorist, ‘the film records what is too small and too big to be noticed, what is transient and secondary; it shows the material world in its randomness, indeterminacy, infinity – it reveals the “flow of life” itself [...]’<sup>30</sup>.

Using a variety of technical and artistic means, film artists are able to combine two elements in their works: the “plot”, i.e. an inventive, narratively ordered weave of excerpts from the wider world presented in a movie, and the “street”, i.e. the presentation of a busy life in all the multiplicity of its objects and events, shown in a manner which manages to balance out a sensitivity to detail and the epicness of the panorama, which preserves not only the human character, but also their rich surroundings – although inanimate, which is also achieved through the illusion of movement. We can say that for Kracauer a movie is able to liberate the whole presented existence by means of its dehierarchization (alternatively – by shifting a vertical order into a horizontal one) and by its immortalization. At the same time, it makes this existence accessible to the viewer: as a kind of *mise en abyme* of a whole materiality, which is finally perceptible, and not appropriated by the particularisms of the plot (which is the case in many literary works, when a thing receives a specific teleology, for example, a symbolic meaning, and functions just as a magic prop, as a ‘falcon of a story’ to evoke Paul Heyse’s didactic terminology). This is the origin of the thinker’s optimistic conclusion: ‘The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life’<sup>31</sup>.

This concept seems lack sufficient sharpness, it is too one-dimensional. Especially if we want to use Kracauer’s ideas in analyzing Coates’ hypothesis – they do not take into account the problem of irony, which plays such a significant role in *The King of Two Sicilies*; the physical matter of the presented world isn’t so accessible when all the images created are mediated by language. Therefore, I would like to enrich these diagnoses by using more ambiguous conclusions from a much earlier essay by Kracauer entitled *Photography*<sup>32</sup> and thereby following with a text by Lipszyc in which he presents a dialectic reinterpretation of the film theory discussed here. The formula of this approach seems to be much more applicable to the novel written by Kuśniewicz.

As Kracauer states in *Photography*, historical memory is never a complete history record. It captures just its neuralgic part which becomes visible against the background of an overwhelming multitude of images, events and material phenomena. This is the part that will be

<sup>29</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, N.J.; Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup>Adam Lipszyc, ‘Co zostaje z babci, czyli w poszukiwaniu materialistycznej teologii fotografii i filmu’ [What is left from grandma, i.e. in search of a materialistic theology of photography and film], *Widok. Teorie i Praktyki Kultury Wizualnej*, no. 4 (2013): 11.

<sup>31</sup>Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 300.

<sup>32</sup>Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Photography’, trans. Thomas Y Levin, *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 421–36.

able to outlive the erosion of the time passing by – as an answer to a question, unattainable from within a given epoch, what will be memorized from this historical complexity. A dual division thus emerges: firstly, into so-called monograms, i.e. elements that go beyond the immanent frame of spacetime, crystallizing its essence or the truth contained in it in the form of a single image, a single name. Secondly, into matter that lacks meaning, which is neglected and therefore ‘unsalvationable, and has no chance for a historical afterlife. Photography governs the domain of these remains. It captures not so much the individual signature of the subject or event, but rather its superficial, external conditioning. This is how a truly spectral reproduction, devoid of this monogram, comes into existence: ‘Photography assembles fragments around a nothing [...] it is not the person who appears in his or her photograph, but the sum of what can be deducted from him or her’<sup>33</sup>.

However, is it really true that a dress worn by an old lady (this is Kracauer’s example) or a favorite book she is holding are unable to convey some of the important aspects of her irretrievably gone life? Is it true that the epoch’s fashion, colors, poses and moods remain outside the sphere of this epoch’s nominality? Maybe the opposite is true? Maybe there are no sublime, transcendental emblems of the spacetimes that have already died away? These are questions posed by Lipszyc, and in response, he proposes a model combining some aspects of both concepts discussed here. A new film theory is thus constructed, and it should be interpreted as a more general vision of a dialectic reproduction of the past:

The film wants to say something, but suddenly it strays into an alley, wanders along it, showing more than it should, more or less involuntarily registering the surface of objects, initiating the local liberation of material reality. [...] When telling a story, the film makes a certain promise: it promises that it will do justice to the people and objects presented, that it will extract and convey the truth about them, that it will capture their unforgettable names in the plot, the final memory image. The irony, however, is that he must inevitably break that promise, because names are not in the story – at least in our world dominated by *ratio* and laced with nothingness. Real names remain in the nameless, the overlooked and abandoned, in the shells of matter itself, in the street. The film must, therefore, repeatedly admit to a lie, suspend the story, break the order of meanings, and reach for what cannot be remembered, but is most memorable, what is devoid of truth, but, being ‘the other’ of an inevitably mendacious story, unexpectedly becomes the proper premise of this truth<sup>34</sup>.

Maybe this is the reason why the autoreferential prose of Kuśniewicz, negating or negotiating its own meanings, is so devoted to the exploration of the outskirts, backgrounds and margins; maybe this is the source of its sensitivity to the complex ambiguity of differences and repetitions. Between life’s ‘plot’ and the ‘street’, a search for names-monograms is taking place. Sometimes they can be found on the surface of convention, sometimes they are hidden, even lost, thrown into an inner crypt as an inexpressible reality concerning ourselves or the world around us. It is not meaningless that the notebook of Emil R., the main source of the story told in a novel, is pulled out from the river in which a young boy commits suicide by throwing himself into it. Its contents, reconstructed by the narrator (often with the use of free indirect

<sup>33</sup>Kracauer, 431.

<sup>34</sup>Lipszyc, ‘Co zostaje z babci, czyli w poszukiwaniu materialistycznej teologii fotografii i filmu’, 15.

speech or prosopopeic transcription of the main character's voice), transform into a foggy testimony of a long forgotten life. Finders of the notebook can decode just one sentence written in it: 'Once upon a time...' (KTS 197) – the sentence, as general as possible, an open beginning denoting everything and nothing at the same time. So, handwriting itself cannot be (at least on the level of the plot) an object of cryptological investigation. They are what seal Emil's ultimate end. We cannot ignore the fact that this 'Once upon a time...', which is both part of a convention and a statement written by Emil R., is also a beginning to *The King of Two Sicilies* itself: 'Once upon a time there were two sisters, Elizabeth and Bernadette, who had one brother, Emil' (KTS 3)<sup>35</sup>. Perhaps this means that literature, especially in the specific formula of 'movie-prose', not so much salvages, but rather allows what is under-articulated to be complemented; it allows to images to be presented that enable the epoch (or maybe rather our conceptualization of the epoch) to finally see itself. 'Once upon a time...', in an ironic turn on a convention, nothing is finalised here. It is merely the beginning of this extraordinary *bildungsroman* about Emil R.

★

Emil is born as a premature baby, 'the result of that stormy Imperial night' (KTS 14). He was conceived by intercourse during which both his father and mother fantasized about having sex with another person. Both of them also remained clothed in line with the Viennese fashion of the time. The subjectivity of the novel's main character is thus presented as doubled from the very beginning. He is born (on the birthday of Franz Joseph, by the way) both from individual phantasm and the ideas of a given period. He seems to be somehow aware of this when he considers his similarity to the model protagonist of the male adolescence narrative – Emil from the work by Rousseau<sup>36</sup> (KTS 55). Kazimierz Bartoszyński points out that Emil's sisters also have significative names: the oldest of the siblings, Elżbieta (Elizabeth), called Lieschen (she is named after empress Sissi, KTS 66), and the youngest one, Bernadetta (Bernadette), or Detta, named after Saint Bernadette of Lourdes<sup>37</sup>.

Emil's childhood plays a significant role in the novel as the period in which all of the protagonist's hopes, fears and desires come into existence. They will haunt him throughout his whole, yet very short life. We see the boy mainly in scenes depicting the peculiar games of the siblings (or 'games' as Kuśniewicz would put it) initiated by Lieschen, for whom these games are a source of cruel pleasure, whilst the passive, timid Detta falls victim to her ideas. Emil is the passive spectator of events for whom a whole performance is prepared. In the first of these sequences,

<sup>35</sup>In one episode, Emil writes down the first sentence of his 'lyrical diary', but unlike the first sentence of *The King of Two Sicilies* it begins not with two sisters, but with Emil: 'Es war einmal der Jungling Emil und er hatte zwei Schwestern' [The abovementioned alteration isn't present in the English version of the book: 'Once upon a time there were two sisters, Elizabeth and Bernadette, who had one brother, Emil...' (KTS 173) – G.R.]. We can risk the statement that at this point Kuśniewicz marks the movement of the shift of subjectivity, inscribing it into the narrative about ourselves, which, when we become a part of the past, no longer belongs to us.

<sup>36</sup>It would also be interesting to juxtapose Emil R. with the title character of Zofia Nałkowska's novel *Hrabia Emil* [Count Emil] from 1921 – that hero also, albeit more casually, occupies the position of a masochist in his childhood, even fantasizing about being beaten by a tutor; cf. also the following passage: 'Child's play turned into suffering. Emil adored Joanna. He trembled with her gestures, words, orders. He hung his eyes on her lips. He wanted terribly to call her now: miss Joanna, lady. On long evenings of dreams, he composed sentences in which he expressed this request' – Zofia Nałkowska, *Hrabia Emil* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1977), 30.

<sup>37</sup>Bartoszyński, 'Ironia i egzystencja. Uwagi o "Królu Obojga Sycylii" Andrzeja Kuśniewicza', 258.

Detta, forced by her sister to imitate various animals<sup>38</sup>, kneels in front of Lieschen in the sumptuous living room of the household on a piece of parquet – usually covered by a carpet, but now uncovered as if a carefully guarded secret was revealed. Describing a triangular relationship, the center of which is Lieschen's attempt to seduce Emil into incest<sup>39</sup>, Kuśniewicz also cites here one of the basic figures of the sadomasochistic universe, although the actual quasi-erotic agreement is here between the torturer and the viewer – not her direct, humiliated victim<sup>40</sup>:

Emil stands on the side, not important, taken into consideration by neither of the two girls. But this is only a pretense. [...] In a moment, perhaps, *with the point of her shoe – still almost a child's, with a bow or pom-pom adorning it – Lisa will nudge her sister on her forehead or shoulder*. Or perhaps this will occur after we have left the drawing room of Mr. and Mrs. R. in the Stubenring (KTS 18, emphasis mine – A.Z.).

In Emil's memory, the observed scenes are ambiguous, as they bring both anxiety caused by the violent rituals performed by his sister (as if she is actually practicing for the role of a mistress) and a certain unbearable pleasure, already realized at that time as merely a virtual fulfillment of a desire whose object is unattainable. In some fragments Lieschen's cruelty has an almost caricatural character. It suggests that these memories were retroactively supplemented with events which could not have taken place. At the same time, however, on a different level of the narrative, Kuśniewicz is once again testing the plasticity of sadomasochistic aesthetics:

Sometimes Detta's hands are tied behind her back [by Lieschen – A.Z.], not to prevent any protest, which would never happen, but to make the ritual, according to Lieschen, 'more grown-up and serious'. This is an idea she got from an illustration in a magazine for grown-ups. Then follow some words of ritual warning: 'If you dare to do anything...' – here Lieschen's voice and expression become threatening – 'remember that there's something hanging in the pantry cupboard'.

What she means is a carpet beater [...] At the mention of this, Detta draws in her shoulders and hangs her head even lower. [...] Emil stands still, his arms hanging at his sides, and says nothing (KTS 138).

<sup>38</sup>Detta 'thinks about her sister with fear and respect, mixed also with a fervent doglike love and fascination (KTS 140, highlight – A.Z.). Lieschen is also trying to get Detta to be stung or bitten by a bumblebee, which is a fairly obvious sexual symbol intended for Emil, who almost reaches orgasm when he looks at his sisters (KTS 141-144). Representations of the perverted relations between children and animals in literature are a topic for a separate study – it is worth mentioning here, for example, their great importance for the prose of Leo Lipski (in works such as *Niespokojni* [Restless], *Piotruś* [Peter] or *Miasteczko* [Little Town]; see Antoni Zając, "Poniedziałek – Ireny". *Fantomowe Kresy* Leo Lipskiego', *Narracje o Zagładzie*, no. 4 (2019): 285–86). See also the chapter of a controversial book by Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'Why the (Lesbian) Child Requires an Interval of Animal. The Family Dog as a Time Machine', in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 2009), 89–119.

<sup>39</sup>Apart from *The King of Two Sicilies*, the motif of incest appears in Kuśniewicz's earlier *Eroica* and three years later *Stan nieważkości* [The State of Weightlessness], where the sister who is the object of desire also appears with another, younger girl dominated by her, but there the subject fantasizes about being not only a brother but also, metaphorically, a father – a father of 'a little rascal born of great longing' Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *Stan nieważkości* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1973), 298. See Adrianna Jakóbczyk, 'Motywy o cechach symboli w opisach miłości incestualnej. O trzech powieściach Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Motifs with the features of symbols in the descriptions of incestual love. About three novels by Andrzej Kuśniewicz], *Amor Fati*, no. 4 (2015): 135–73.

<sup>40</sup>Emil notes later: 'Detta was the object of these experiments, but not their purpose. It was I, each time, who became the true object on which the experiments were performed. I shall never find out whether Detta also experienced pleasure from submission, or whether she agreed to everything only because she was afraid of her sister. And did she know that it was I who, by proxy, took the whole burden upon myself?' (KTS 112).



Lieschen's experiments are not only an expression of her sadistic imagination, they are not just a way to seduce Emil, but they are also a kind of childish ritual which aims to explore the bodily and mental boundaries between violence and polymorphic pleasure<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, they are a matrix for future experiences, also perceived in the categories of the theatre – the theatre of desire, and – secondarily, but this is what we find here to be the most interesting – the theatre of memory, and (to a lesser extent) of the culture of everyday life itself, as Elżbieta Dutka<sup>42</sup> suggests. This is a different, but also legitimate, way to interpret the artificiality and excessive conventionality of the setting.

Besides, Lieschen, Detta and Emil literally perform in children's theaters and shows of "tableaux vivants", which were a fashionable attraction at aristocratic parties at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. The game with gender dynamics (evoking Androgyne paradigm which is omnipresent in Kuśniewicz works<sup>43</sup>) is a crucial element: the tiny and pale Emil plays Saint Cecilia or a fairy<sup>44</sup>, whilst Lieschen is a page or a little devil. These roles become a part of Lieschen's ritualized entertainment: as a boy she gives her 'sister' Cecilia holy communion, represented by an almond: 'The almond assumed the identity of a Host. The scene occurred less than six months after his first communion. [...] With a feeling of mortal sin he accepts in anguish the diabolical Host from his sister's ink-stained fingers' (KTS 59). The motif of the 'communion of souls' returns in an image of a later period, in which Emil takes communion, despite not having confessed his thoughts about his sister – so he decides to spit it out and bury it. However, Lieschen decides to force him to eat the wafer once again with her in order to establish it as a symbol of their incestuous covenant<sup>45</sup>: 'If you behave and do everything I tell you to, perhaps – who knows – perhaps I'll marry you. I'll think about it. Now get away from here – Mama's back!' (KTS 150).

The sequences described consist of vibrating, affective memory images, in the form of which the desire that haunts Emil chaotically recurs, affecting at the same time the topography of his inner life and his external functioning – his idleness, decadent inertia, which portrays Emil as somehow melancholic, suspended in an unsuccessful search for a fulfilled existence. He is doomed to unproductive repetitions: 'Again and again these secondary images. Mirror reflections primarily, always incomplete, stunted in their definite form from their moment of birth and transform into other equally stunted shapes' (KTS 113). It seems that the atmosphere of the early days of the war on the front to which he is sent also affects his mood: anxiety, waiting, the feeling of calm before the storm – 'but the war seems suspended, like a project, a foreboding or perhaps a promise' (KTS 87). The protagonist claims stubbornly that the main problem is the lack of (written with a capital let-

<sup>41</sup>Melanie Klein investigated similar tangles of sexuality and violence in the psychological development of a child – see e.g. Melanie Klein, 'The Sexual Activities of Children', in *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), 164–78.

<sup>42</sup>Elżbieta Dutka, *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza* [Not only geographic areas. About the works of Andrzej Kuśniewicz] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2008), 164.

<sup>43</sup>See e.g. Wiegandt, *Austria Felix, czyli o micie Galicji w polskiej prozie współczesnej*; Mieczysław Dąbrowski, 'Androgyne w prozie Andrzeja Kuśniewicza' [Androgyne in the prose of Andrzej Kuśniewicz], *Miesięcznik Literacki*, no. 4 (1981): 50–59.

<sup>44</sup>Lieschen stabs Emil with a pin; he is dressed as a fairy, and, 'like Saint Sebastian, in spirit tendered not only his arm but his whole body to the darts of his sister, desiring them, anticipating them, and realizing with some apprehension that he was made happy by having been chosen as a living target' (KTS 57–58). On the topic of Saint Sebastian as an allegory of masochism see e.g. Richard A. Kaye, 'Determined Rapture': St. Sebastian and the Victorian Discourse of Decadence', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27, no. 1 (1999): 269–303.

<sup>45</sup>Its renewal is then followed by blood vows, which Lieschen induces Emil to make in Trieste (KTS 66–67).



ter but significantly undefined) ‘That’ – lost, but virtually remaining in subjects, objects or experiences. In this sense, Emil is going through a specific mourning, despite his sister not, in fact, being dead. However, as Sigmund Freud states in his canonical *Mourning and Melancholia*<sup>46</sup>, followed by the Hungarian-French psychoanalysts Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham<sup>47</sup>, mourning is not just about working through the loss of a loved one’s life – its subject can also be a feeling, an idea, or even an event gaining its phantasmatic prefiguration, which “in reality” never took place.

As Török and Abraham show, melancholy is the result of mourning, the work of which could not be successfully completed thanks to introjection, which means absorbing the missing object, and thus finding an adequate space for the void created by the loss within the “I” itself, and then – denouncing it. The reversal of introjection, and therefore the effect of chronic mourning, is incorporation. In this process, that what is lost starts to phantasmatically live inside the subject, in the psychic space called by thinkers a crypt<sup>48</sup>. Incorporation makes the object stored in the crypt unnamable. Moreover, the subject’s language is turned into a kind of cipher, coding a traumatic lack, but also wreaking havoc in all communication: with the environment and with one’s own memory. The symptom of the indirect transfer of messages from the crypt are codenames, i.e., significant words that stand out in the speech of the “I”, and thus – by way of interpretation – allow at least a partial decoding of his or her experience<sup>49</sup>.

Perhaps the full use of Török and Abraham’s concept is not fully justified here. It is though probably worth getting inspired by it, in order to reveal unclear or mysterious elements from Emil’s cinematic stream of consciousness, which hide important, otherwise impossible to express, content – the previously mentioned “That” trapped in Emil. The word ‘Solferino’ is one of these elements. In the novel it functions as a complex, dual symbol, constructed analogically to the dual meaning of the word itself. For *solferino* is both the name of a color fashionable in the early twentieth century (‘It was a dark violet that looked saturated with blood’ KTS 49) and the name of the town under which a battle between Austro-Hungarian (and therefore the Kingdom of Two Sicilies) and Piedmont forces was fought in 1859. It was one of the bloodiest battles of those times, resulting in the largest number of victims, and thus providing the impulse for funding of the International Red Cross movement<sup>50</sup>.

*Solferino* is the color of Elizabeth’s first “adult” dress, which she, to the simultaneous delight and horror of Emil, wore to the theater for the performance of *Oedipus The King* they watched together ‘in

<sup>46</sup>Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, in *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere, vol. 4 (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 152–70.

<sup>47</sup>See in particular Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham, ‘Mourning or Melancholia. Introjection versus Incorporation’, in *The Shell and the Kernel. Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Nicholas Rand, vol. 1 (Chicago – London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 125–39.

<sup>48</sup>As Giorgio Agamben suggests (apparently inspired by the thoughts of Török and Abraham, but not directly referring to it), ‘the crypt contains only images, like a picture book for children who do not yet know how to read, like the *Imagerie d’Epinal* of an illiterate people. The body of desires is an image. And what is unavowable in desire is the image we have made of it for ourselves. [...] Until the moment when we begin to understand that desire will remain forever unfulfilled – and that this unavowed desire is ourselves, forever prisoners in the crypt’. Giorgio Agamben, ‘Desiring’, in *Profanations*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 53–54.

<sup>49</sup>See Maria Török and Nicolas Abraham, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986) and also; Ireneusz Piekarski, *Strategie lektury podejrzliwej* [Strategies of Suspicious Reading] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 2018), 46–82.

<sup>50</sup>See a book by the founder of The International Red Cross Movement Henri Dunant – Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: ICRC, 2011).

a darkened box full of the stifling scent [...], filled with solferino-colored light, a sin-polluted atmosphere transferred in a seemingly innocent way to his sister' (KTS 50). Marta Jacobi, a woman who is an object of Emil's sexual fantasies, appearing only as a phantom in his memories, wears a dress of the same color. Viewed from this perspective, it seems that the word 'solferino' and its returning repeatedly (even in the last sentence uttered by Emil) is a synecdoche not so much of Lieschen herself, but of the unfulfilled desire associated with her, which in language is manifested only in the form of this single, secret word. However, we have to consider the second meaning of this noun as well.

Mentions about the "fields of Magenta and Solferino" appear in the work's early parts – it turns out, that these refer to Emil's grandfather, who (similarly to Joseph von Trotta, although we do not know if he was as heroic as Joseph Roth's character from *Radetzsky's March*<sup>51</sup>) died during the Battle of Solferino. However, this fact is not only an important part of the family story, it also has a much stronger impact on the protagonist's life – in his imagination (Kuśniewicz uses the term "participatory imagination") there are scenes and images related to the battle: 'the white uniforms of those historic years of Solferino and Magenta, specters dragging themselves along through mist or fog, the battlefields on the Lombard plain, ghosts chanting in chorus in the Elysian fields' (KTS 30) Moreover, Emil describes himself as a rider travelling through 'the battlefield of Solferino' (KTS 28) and his memories interfere with memory artifacts which source is hard to establish.

Is it possible that Emil, as a soldier, feels overwhelmed by his grandfather's legacy, who was both merited and killed in the battle? We know for sure that the legend of this heroic death accompanies the protagonist when he decides to join his ancestor's unit – the 12th Regiment of Lancers<sup>52</sup>. For him however, this legend is also dark and bloody: 'Solferino meant defeat, death, a black night filled with the premonition of catastrophe, with the groans of wounded men, with caravans of white ghosts dragging themselves across the battlefield (KTS 48-49). The words of warning from *Radetzsky March* can be recalled here, in this context they sound like a curse: 'Don't forget your grandfather'<sup>53</sup>

There are also more serious complications or connections between what is our own and what is not, which should be seriously considered. Solferino returns as a code name for a trauma, not so much experienced by the subject himself as inherited – this is the part of the story about his grandfather that is drowned out by the mythologizing narrative about a victory achieved at the cost of his death. Therefore, although Emil repeatedly states that he is not interested in the war and that he is in no way afraid of it, in his last, hectic conversation with his friend, second lieutenant Kocourek, he admits that he is tormented by a feeling of defeat, of destruction. The scene in which Emil is in the cemetery is an outstanding representation of the memory "infected" by phantom tanatic messages:

I thought that some of the gravestones had rooted away to such an extent that they had reverted to childlike dimensions. The coffins of old people have changed with the passage of years into white or light blue boxes, containing the brittle, thin bones of infants. And at night, when a full moon rises over the Dolomites, these childish graves begin to babble, slowly, one word an hour, with delibera-

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Roth, *The Radetzky March*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 2002).

<sup>52</sup>Emil and Kocourek could choose which regiment they wanted to belong to as 'volunteers for one year's service' (KTS 48). In interviews, Kuśniewicz mentions that in this unit, also stationing in Fehértemplom, 'his mother's great-uncle' served. (Taraniénko, 'Odbicie. Rozmowa z Andrzejem Kuśniewiczem', 457).

<sup>53</sup>Roth, *The Radetzky March*, 67.

tion, like infants. Phrases taken from the store of memory, shreds of something that has or has not happened, that has never been said, but grows now like a soft white fungus (KTS 106).

Solferino, as a hidden signifier refers to the future as well. It is a 'dark harbinger'<sup>54</sup> that reveals knowledge of what may come. In addition to the transfer of this under-articulated content, there is also a post-memory component – Solferino appears in repeatedly reproduced illustrations and engravings or in the regiment's memorial book, always painted in beautiful colors, despite hiding a dark reverse, haunting the *belle époque* constantly and carrying its warning.

Thus, two lines of meaning intersect in the word *solferino*. The color of the dress inevitably evokes the color of blood, whilst an unfulfilled desire is combined with chronically traumatizing violence, tearing apart the apparent peace of the *belle époque*. Returning to the remarks on the concept of Kracauer, we could say that in its duality, Solferino is a monogram-cryptonym for both Emil's memory – disturbed, functioning in the logic of affects, and of the historical spacetime pictured in *The King of Two Sicilies* – erotic and tanatic Sicily, dead for history and still haunting memory. There are actually at least two kings (Ferdinand II and Francis II of Bourbon) looking from dusty portraits at a third king – Emil, who states: 'The duality in the name of a kingdom which perished years ago bears in it the seeds and sentence of death' (KTS 23)

Kuśniewicz's novel seems to be one of the most interesting attempts at an experimental novel in Polish literature in the latter half of the twentieth century, with an innovative play with the economy (both in terms of literature and film) of the narrative, which is capable of presenting a complex domain of disturbed memory not only in the dimension of the plot but also structurally. For this purpose, the author uses the ironic potential of the distance between the spacetime of the world presented – dead, frozen in an ornament – and the moment of the story's construction, where the foregone present meets the actual present; it also draws conclusions from the assumption that the experiences, phantasms or sensual phenomena anchored in our psyche are not always explicitly available to us, but rather tend to exist in a coded form, unclear to ourselves. In the chaos of the past, the secret monogram of the subject or of its epoch is revealed where it is least expected, and referring to something even more different. The monogram can be embodied even by the color of the dress, recognized as the latest (possibly the last) fashion trend.

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In conclusion, I would like to suggest one more area of interpretation, although this will only be a contribution to a broader inquiry. It seems that the search for monograms, these encoded emblems, can be carried out not at the level of diegesis, but at the level of the speaking I, especially assuming that it is sylleptically associated with the authorial I. The narrative of *The King of Two Sicilies* is essentially auctorial by nature, but it also consists of numerous parabases which, as I said before, formally and in terms of content testify to the spacetime distance between events and their actors – human and non-human – and the one who speaks.

<sup>54</sup>In Gilles Deleuze's theory, the "dark harbinger" foreshadows the moment of communication between two series of objects establishing the relationship of difference and repetition with each other – Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

An example of such an interruption is one of the novel's last paragraphs, ultimately proving the superconsciousness of the narrator, looking to the dead world:

One might therefore begin everything anew, in one way or another. Even so the end would be the same, because the past, down to its smallest details, is irrevocable and indivisible. In spite of the fact that since then so many matters have lost their importance and even become somewhat ridiculous, like the fashion for affectation in feelings, for despair, for hopelessness. And for exaggeration. Like the sentimental silent pictures of the early years of this century. Or like Vienna dress fashion *Wiener Mode* from 1900. Like the faint scent of perfume rising from the pages of the *Wiener Illustrierte* of 1914, or from a box found years later and containing, along with visiting cards of persons unknown to us and programs from dances, a few yellowed photographs (KTS 196-197).

This reminiscence may serve as an accurate summary of the earlier considerations on the dialectical nature of monograms, which may not only be residual, but in their impermanent materiality they are both fallen and saved. Moreover, they retain their meaning only partially, existing mainly in a form of unclear presence. It seems that it at least illustrates a certain truth about the mechanisms of individual memory, so it would probably not be a mistake to assume that this is a statement whose meaning can be extrapolated to the level of the subject itself, the one who is formulating these words. It is therefore interesting that in *Moja historia literatury* ['My History of Literature'] Kuśniewicz writes about the attic of his family house, where the magazines 'Wiener Illustrierte' and 'Wiener Mode' were stored<sup>55</sup>. The attic itself can also be understood as a metaphor for what indeed remains of the former present, but is separate, devoid of significant meaning, and as a psychotopographic metaphor that builds an analogy between the space of the house and a certain layer of the subject's internal structure – a memory, an object, a desire, a longing are located in 'my' attic, but layered and covered with dust<sup>56</sup>.

We can continue such speculation by returning to the topic of cinema and inspiration by film techniques in presenting events. In the novel itself, in addition to the previously analyzed meta-narrative remarks on this subject, we can also find a fragment about specific film works:

While on the subject of films, it is perhaps worth mentioning that during that week the only movie house in Fehertemplom, the Bio-Moderne, was showing a film in two parts entitled *Queen of the Nile*; having been shown with great success in more important towns in the monarchy, from Vienna and Graz to Budapest and Arad, it was finishing its run here (KTS 10).

As emphasized by Kuśniewicz himself, the author of the series of essays devoted to cinema (they were published in "Film" magazine)<sup>57</sup>, movie art had been present in his life since a very early stage, perceived by him as something fascinating and secretive (PM 12). In an interview with

<sup>55</sup> Andrzej Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 122–23.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Marta Raczyńska, *Czas uwarstwiony na gąsawskim poddaszu. Antropologiczny szkic o przestrzeni, przedmiotach i obcowaniu z przeszłością* [Time layered in the attic of Gąsawa. An anthropological sketch about space, objects and communing with the past] (Kraków: Libron, 2016).

<sup>57</sup> This is how Elżbieta Dutka writes about Kuśniewicz's columns: 'Short statements form a personal history of cinema and film. Recalling cinematographs – Viennese bioscopes, which he remembers from childhood, the author also writes about his own experiences and emotions from that period, outlining the maturing process of the viewer – an increasingly aware recipient of culture'. Dutka, *Okolice nie tylko geograficzne. O twórczości Andrzeja Kuśniewicza*, 143.

Grażyna Szcześniak, he develops this thought and describes his first ever visit to the Viennese cinema – where the film, the name of which is already known to us, was screened. However, it was not yet the end of the show:

The first time I saw a screen through the eyes of a child in Vienna [...] The film *Queen of the Nile* was playing [...], which made a smaller impression on me than the fragments of the news chronicle, or rather something that could be called a news chronicle today, and which was then one of many components of the two-hour program. The Balkan war was being fought, and we were shown a battlefield full of corpses and wounded, around which paramedics, or maybe gravediggers, were bustling, with elongated, caricatured shapes, moving angularly, with jumps, as if in some kind of circus dance... (PM 51)

*Queen of the Nile* is a title-cryptonym, functioning as a screen memory<sup>58</sup> against the shocking images of death and violence that do not appear in the *King of Two Sicilies* neither in a direct relation nor in a cinematic mediation. Instead, they are grotesquely deformed (perhaps, already in the flashback itself, by the memory), and thus appear even more disturbing, difficult to tame. The screen displays the traumatic truth of the times, which for Kuśniewicz also evoked a fetishized belle époque – in the same *Puzzle pamięci* ['The Puzzles of Memory'] he claims that as a little boy in Vienna he waved to the emperor, who smiled at him (PM 10). He also boasts about having a photo picturing a few years old Otto von Habsburg with his dedication which he received during a Austro-Hungarian symposium in Duino in 1983 (PM 73-74). The actual content, the monogram of the I.R-ish cipher, is again hidden in the lining, this time in the lining of the filmic Cleopatra's costume.

This is the cipher that the author writes about in the chapter of *Moja historia literatury* devoted to the 'Archduke' Stanisław Jerzy Lec – through him, everything related to the largely phantasmic identification with the dead I.R. world is communicated: these are evocative keywords relating to its characters, moods and places. Commenting on a somewhat hermetic joke by Lec, Kuśniewicz emphasizes what makes such a coding something truly intriguing, and at the same time, distinctive of his work: 'You will say: a joke. Indeed – a joke. It seems to be a joke. A half-joke. However, the other half, not clearly named – is a piece of the code. Irony is interwoven with genuine lyricism so inseparably here, that it is impossible to unravel this problem'<sup>59</sup>. Another, hidden layer of the code, which is intended only for insiders, seems to refer to scenes such as those seen in the Viennese movie theater, which remain implicitly 'a special conglomerate, a concentrate of complex impressions'<sup>60</sup>.

translated by Gerard Ronge

<sup>58</sup>Referring to Freud's concept of 'screen memory' (*Deckerrinerung*). Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 3 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), 299–322. Kuba Mikurda defines 'screen memory' as 'displacement (*Verschiebung*) appearing in memory not because of its explicit content, but its metonymic connection with another, potentially traumatic memory that has been displaced as such' – quoted after Natalia Lemann, *Historie alternatywne i steampunk w literaturze. Archipelagi badawczo-interpretacyjne* [Alternative and steampunk stories in literature. Research and interpretation archipelagos] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2019), 24.

<sup>59</sup>Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury*, 184.

<sup>60</sup>Kuśniewicz, *Moja historia literatury*.

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# KEYWORDS

Andrzej Kuśniewicz

*cryptonym*

**monogram**

**ABSTRACT:**

The paper is devoted to *The King of Two Sicilies* – a novel from 1970 by Andrzej Kuśniewicz. The novel is analyzed as an intertextual, historiographic metanovel, depicting the relations between a single subject, its memory, marked by distortions of transgenerational transmissions, and the historical events it is entangled in. Special attention has been given to those aspects of the novel which, as Paul Coates suggests, make its narrative structure similar to a movie's structure. The concepts of Siegfried Kracauer, alongside those of Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török, have been also used in the interpretation. These are also the authors of two crucial terms: monogram and cryptonym.



*m e m o r y*

history

NARRATION

*P R E S E N C E***NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Antoni Zając – born 1996, MA, Ph.D. student at the Doctoral School of the Humanities at Warsaw University. He is currently working on a project devoted to the works of Leo Lipski for which he received a prestigious “Diamond Grant” from the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. He is also interested in the uses of psychoanalysis in interpretations of literary texts, in the relations between philosophy, theology and contemporary literature, and in postsecular theory.

# The Cinematicity of Literary Cyberpunk

on the Example of *Neuromancer*  
by William Gibson

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The world in some near future, ruled by supranational corporations. Overpopulated megacities, where ultramodern skyscrapers stand next to slums. Filthy streets, bathed in neon lights, outdoor screens, and holograms. Dynamically developing new technologies paired with pauperization and an advancing breakdown of social ties. Electronics and bioengineering influencing the body and mind, leading to a blurring of the line between humans and machines. Cyberspace as a fighting pit, in which rebellious individuals fight with the oppressive system. Such a set of plot and iconographic motifs appears in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). Thanks to that novel, cyberpunk, a sub-genre of science fiction, found its place on the literary map, and also started to influence other forms of art, such as painting, functional graphics, rock music, and especially film.

Gibson's prose has been filmed three times: *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) by Robert Longo and *Hotel New Rose* (*New Rose Hotel*, 1998) by Abel Ferrara are adaptations of his early short stories (from 1981 and 1984, respectively), similarly to the short-feature film by Tim Leandro *Tomorrow Calling* (1993), based on *The Gernsback Continuum* (1981). A literary vision of a world both modernized and degraded by technology, characteristic for Gibson, also found its less clear reflection in films which were not adaptations of his works, such as: *RoboCop* (1987) by Paul Verhoeven, *Tetsuo* (1989) by Shin'ya Tsukamoto, *Ganheddo* (1989) by Masato Harada, *Hardware* (1990) by Richard Stanley, *Nemesis* (1992) by Alber Pyuna, *Strange Days* (1995) by Kathryn Bigelow, *The Demolitionist* (1995) by Robert Kurtzman, *Ghost in the Shell/ Kokaku Kidotai* (1995) and *Avalon* (2000) by Mamoru Oshii, *Nirvana* (1997) by Gabriele Salvatores, *One Point O* (2003) by Jeff Renfroe and Martein Thorssona or *Anon* (2017) by Andrew Niccol. The box office success of *The Matrix* (1999) by the Wachowski sisters can be treated as the culmination of the assimilation of cyberpunk by the cultural mainstream.

Although Gibson's work had a strong influence on science fiction cinema, the cinema's role (both direct and indirect) in the shaping of the aesthetics of cyberpunk prose should also be stressed. Talking about his inspirations, Gibson admitted that he did not separate literature from other forms of art: "[...] I don't separate literature from other arts. Fiction, television, music, film – all provide material in the form of images and phrases and codes that creep into my writing in ways both deliberate and unconscious"<sup>1</sup>. The category of picture seems to be the most important in his prose. Descriptions often do not play the role of illustrations here, ancillary to the plot; Gibson seems to subordinate the plot to the dynamics of moving pictures: pictures created with words.

In 1981, having published *Johnny Mnemonic*, Gibson was working on his next short story, entitled *Burning Chrome* (1982). The plot of both is set in a futuristic scenery of highly urbanized, technicized, and at the same time, depressingly filthy and overpopulated metropolises, such as Chiba City in Japan or the megalopolis commonly known as Sprawl, which extends along the whole US East Coast<sup>2</sup>. At roughly the same time, Gibson watched *Escape from New York* (1981) by John Carpenter. Soon after that he would return to his debut novel, *Neuromancer*, for which Carpenter's film would become an important source of inspiration<sup>3</sup>.

As Ronald Reagan was taking office as president, Carpenter was presenting his own dystopian, largely satirical vision of America in the near future as an authoritarian police state (additionally entangled in a pointless conflict with the USSR). As a result of a staggering increase in crime the whole of Manhattan is transformed into a huge prison, where prisoners serving life sentences live according to their own, cruel rules. After a terrorist attack in which a plane with the president on board crashes on the island, Snake Plissken (Kurt Russel), an outlawed war hero, is tricked into rescuing the puppet head of state from the Manhattan prisoners.

<sup>1</sup> Larry McCaffery, "An Interview with William Gibson", *Mississippi Review* 16, No 2-3 (1988): 219.

<sup>2</sup> In Gibson's nomenclature, Sprawl is an informal, slang expression for an agglomeration Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis. *Neuromancer* is the first instalment of what is commonly known as the *Sprawl trilogy*, followed by *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). The plot of each of those loosely connected novels is set in the same urban reality.

<sup>3</sup> McCaffery, "An Interview with William Gibson": 219.

Gibson later recalled that he was particularly intrigued by a scene in which the commander of the operation, Hauk (Lee Van Cleef), turns to Snake with a rhetorical question regarding his war past: “You flew the Gullfire over Leningrad, didn’t you?”). Although from the perspective of the plot this sentence is rather irrelevant to the rest of the film, Gibson saw in it some of “the best SF, where a casual reference can imply a lot”<sup>4</sup>. In *Neuromancer* Armitage, a former Special Force officer who hires the protagonist, a hacker named Case, to take part in a criminal action whose final takes place in the virtual reality, is a veteran of a similar American-Soviet conflict. One can see a more intellectual counterpart of Snake in Case, a “cyber-space cowboy”<sup>5</sup>, whereas Armitage is a combination of both Hauk and Plissken. There are more examples of this kind of reference, typically strongly paraphrased and camouflaged in *Neuromancer*. The most important implications of the mention of the flight over Leningrad refer not so much to the plot, but rather to the status of the represented world – a world deprived of balance. In both cases, a pessimistic vision of the future is revealed within the space of the megacity.

In the initial sequence of *Escape from New York* we see the night panorama of a metropolis, which would normally be shining with lights – however, in the film it is dark, with a faint, cold, death-like glow. A police helicopter is patrolling the area against such a background. According to Andrzej Kołodyński, the landscape of this city-prison is revealed gradually, mostly via the protagonist<sup>6</sup>, although not always from an objective perspective. The narration here often has an objective character: especially in the first half of the film, the camera frequently follows Snake from some distance, showing his actions in a behavioristic way, as he is moving through the littered, devastated metropolis. Weird and dangerous individuals, some resembling punks, others more like ragged, wild barbarians, lurk in the shadows. The using of rather dim lighting gives the night scenery an atmosphere of alienation and danger, reinforced through the soundtrack based on cool, synthesized sounds.

Perhaps this vision of New York had an influence on how Gibson described Night City – a zone populated mostly by outcasts, rebels belonging to a subculture, as well as dangerous criminals, such as Yakuza members:

[Now he [Case] slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn’t see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, not even the towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electric Company, and Tokyo Bay was a black expanse where gulls wheeled above drifting shoals of white styrofoam. Behind the port lay the city, factory domes dominated by the vast cubes of corporate arcologies. Port and city were divided by a narrow borderland of older streets, an area with no official name. Night City, with Ninsei its heart. By day, the bars down Ninsei were shuttered and featureless, the neon dead, the holograms inert, waiting, under the poisoned silver sky<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> McCaffery.

<sup>5</sup> William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, translated into Polish by Piotr W. Cholewa (Warszawa: Zysk i S-ka, 1996), 5 [all quoted passages are taken from the original, English version]

<sup>6</sup> Andrzej Kołodyński, *Dziedzictwo wyobraźni. Historia filmu SF* [A legacy of imagination. History of SF film] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa „Alfa”, 1989), 82.

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 7.

Carpenter's film grab's one's attention with the way it operates the contrast between light and shadow, and in Gibson – descriptions accentuating the role of light and its sources in the creation of the picture of the urbanized space. In both cases, light separates the decomposing skyline from the darkness, with one difference: in *Escape from New York* this skyline takes the form of a conventional, intentionally exaggerated fantasy, which belongs to the aesthetics of the early 1980s post-Apocalyptic trend – like the urban equivalent of the desert scenery of George Miller's *Mad Max 2* (1981).

The skyline of Gibson's megalopolis also mirrors the condition of a post-apocalyptic world (or perhaps a world during an apocalypse), but it is about a situation understood in the post-modern context, about hyperreality based on *simulacras* and simulation replacing traditionally understood reality. Each of Gibson's huge metropolises is a desolation deprived of what is real<sup>8</sup> (if we use Jeana Baudrillard's theories, of which Gibson was supposedly unaware, at least while working on *Neuromancer*<sup>9</sup>).

Agnieszka Ćwikiel has stated that in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) the theme of the film is not the apocalypse of the real world – instead, an important change takes place in front of our eyes, for we are dealing with the apocalypse of the image<sup>10</sup>:

Copying and imitating, i.e. the role and functioning of an image, are central problems for Scott. Initially, right after the panorama of the imagined 2019 Los Angeles, the screen is filled with a huge, motionless eye, mirroring a world of complete destruction. This obsession and need to see is constantly reinforced by the juxtaposition of the eye with a photograph, video screens, shop windows, mirrors, electronic monitors. The real world is replaced with a simulated image, and man can be replaced with his perfect copy, surpassing the original<sup>11</sup>.

In *Blade Runner* audiovisual media messages become part of the futuristic architectural landscape thanks to large screens that take up entire walls of gargantuan skyscrapers – the face of a young geisha advertising some medical product is the leitmotif of the film. Because of its simulation-like character, this moving picture seems to be mirroring the nature of the represented world in the film, illustrating Baudrillard's thesis that simulation treats the whole show like one big *simulacrum*<sup>12</sup>.

Artificially generated pictures, often of some media provenance (such as the “towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electronic Company”) which in a way “consume” this literary equivalent of the space of a frame, i.e. the already quoted description of Night City. The opening line: “The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel”, is of key im-

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, “Simulacra and simulation”, translated into Polish by Tadeusz Komendant, in *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów* [Postmodernism. An anthology of translations], edited by R. Nycz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, 1998), 176.

<sup>9</sup> Doug Walker, “Doug Walker Interviews Science Fiction Author William Gibson”, *Impulse*, 15.1. (1988): 38.

<sup>10</sup> Agnieszka Ćwikiel, “Wessani w cyberprzestrzeń” [Sucked into cyberspace], *Film*, No 1 (2000): 116. The screenplay of *Blade runner* was based on the novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick, who is considered to be one of the precursors of cyberpunk.

<sup>11</sup> Ćwikiel.

<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard, “Precesja symulakrów”, 181.

portance here, for it indicates the extent to which Gibson's universe has been dominated by the electronically reproduced visuality, which in a way permeates reality understood in the material sense, swallowing everything, including people. This process is perfectly illustrated by a scene in which Case meets his old love, Linda Lee, in an arcade:

Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard's Castle, Tank War Europa, the New York skyline... And now he remembered her that way, her face bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to a code: her cheekbones flaring scarlet as Wizard's Castle burned, forehead drenched with azure when Munich fell to the Tank War, mouth touched with hot gold as a gliding cursor struck sparks from the wall of a skyscraper canyon<sup>13</sup>.

Out of all the narrative arts, cinema probably remains the most adequate for talking about the culture of the image, which has dominated new media in the postmodern era. There is a strong relation between Gibson's literary and Scott's film vision, which begs the question of whether the writer was in fact inspired by *Blade Runner*. Gibson was afraid of such "accusations", when – thirty minutes into the film – he realized that what he sees on the screen is to a large extent identical with his own idea (he claimed that at the time of the film's premiere, he had already written a substantial part of *Neuromancer*)<sup>14</sup>. Perhaps in this case the aesthetic and topical similarity resulted from common artistic inspirations: suggestive artistic images of megacities from the science fiction comic books published in the French "Métal Hurlant" magazine and its American version, "Heavy Metal" (especially *The Long Tomorrow* [1976], by the team of screenwriter Dan O'Bannon and artist Moebius [Jean Giraud])<sup>15</sup>. Gibson actually stressed that those picture stories were an especially "cinematic" source of inspiration for him<sup>16</sup>, at the same time indicating the specific parafilm character of comic books as sequences of "frames", separated from one another according to a rule akin to that guiding how pieces of film tape are edited, so that together they can create a narrative based on a screenplay.

The influence of film on Gibson understood in such a way, mediated via the art of comic books (related to film, in a sense) resulted both in the static "panoramas" of metropolises, and in cinematized descriptions of protagonists' actions in that environment. In the reception of the book such scenes can be "visualized" in the form of images of a purely cinematic character. If we were to translate the following passage into the language of film, the length of each film shot would reflect one sentence, and the full stop would reflect a montage cut:

<sup>13</sup>Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 8.

<sup>14</sup>William Gibson, "Oh Well, While I'm Here", [https://web.archive.org/web/20070926221513/http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/blog/2003\\_01\\_01\\_archive.asp#90199532](https://web.archive.org/web/20070926221513/http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/blog/2003_01_01_archive.asp#90199532) [date of access: 14.01.2021].

<sup>15</sup>Colin Marshall, "The Long Tomorrow. Discover Moebius' Hard-Boiled Detective Comic that Inspired *Blade Runner*", <https://www.openculture.com/2018/09/long-tomorrow-discover-moebius-hard-boiled-detective-comic-inspired-blade-runner-1975.html>; see also: Gibson, "Oh Well...".

<sup>16</sup>Walker, "Doug Walker Interviews Science Fiction Author William Gibson", 37. The aesthetic and topical relations between *Neuromancer* with the "technicized-mystical" Japanese comic books, especially *Akira* (1982-1990) by Katsuhira Otomo (the author also realized its *anime* film adaptation under the same title in 1988). See Adam Mazurkiewicz, *Z problematyki cyberpunku. Literatura – sztuka – kultura* [Cyberpunk issues. Literature – art – culture] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014), 191-193. It should also be noted that the first two instalments of the cycle were released two years before Gibson's novel was published, showing a similar vision of the Far East big city agglomeration.

He bolted across Ninsei, scattering a pack of strolling sailors. One of them screamed after him in Spanish. Then he was through the entrance, the sound crashing over him like surf, subsonics throbbing in the pit of his stomach. Someone scored a ten-megaton hit on Tank War Europa, a simulated air burst drowning the arcade in white sound as a lurid hologram fireball mushroomed overhead. He cut to the right and loped up a flight of unpainted chip board stairs. He'd come here once with Wage, to discuss a deal in proscribed hormonal triggers with a man called Matsuga. He remembered the hallway, its stained matting, the row of identical doors leading to tiny office cubicles. One door was open now. A Japanese girl in a sleeveless black t-shirt glanced up from a white terminal, behind her head a travel poster of Greece, Aegian blue splashed with streamlined ideograms<sup>17</sup>.

This passage is characterized by a similar kind of “cinematicity” to the series of “frames” in the already mention comic books by O'Bannon and Moebius, in a slightly parodic way referring to the poetics of film *noir*<sup>18</sup>. *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) by John Huston, an adaptation of Dashiell Hammett's novel of the same title (1930), should be considered one of the first artistically perfect manifestations of that tendency in cinema.

Gibson listed *noir* crime stories by Hammett among the books he had read in his youth that impressed him greatly – in the case of Hammett, he was especially intrigued by his specific method of describing the represented world in a way similar to the traditions of the American naturalism, and at the same time honed and intensified to such an extent that as a result even common elements of the described environment gained a genuinely surreal character. In one place Gibson referred to one of the opening scenes of *The Maltese Falcon*, probably the most famous novel by Hammett<sup>19</sup>:

The tappity-tap-tap and the thin bell and muffled whir of Effie Perine's typewriting came through the closed door. Somewhere in a neighboring office a power-driven machine vibrated dully. On Spade's desk a limp cigarette smoldered in a brass tray filled with the remains of limp cigarettes. Ragged grey flakes of cigarette-ash dotted the yellow top of the desk and the green blotter and the papers that were there. A buff-curtained window, eight or ten inches open, let in from the court a current of air faintly scented with ammonia. The ashes on the desk twitched and crawled in the current.

Miss Wonderly watched the grey flakes twitch and crawl. Her eyes were uneasy. She sat on the very edge of the chair. Her feet were flat on the floor, as if she were about to rise. Her hands in dark gloves clasped a flat dark handbag in her lap.

Spade rocked back in his chair and asked: “Now what can I do for you, Miss Wonderly?”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 17.

<sup>18</sup>Mazurkiewicz, *Z problematyki cyberpunku. Literatura – sztuka – kultura*, 273.

<sup>19</sup>McCaffery, „An Interview with William Gibson”: 221.

<sup>20</sup>Dashiell Hammett, *Sokół maltański*, tłum. Wacław Niepokólczycki (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo “Iskry”, 1988), 6-7.

Hammett here achieves an effect typical of the “cinematic” viscosity of his descriptions, which he constructs from simple, concise, typically rather short sentences in an unusually precise way, put together like a sequence of shots registered on a tape, and then edited into a meaningful whole. As observed by Marco Bellardi, the narrator concludes a “para-cinematic narrative contract with the reader”, as a result of which the reader is in a sense obliged to visualize not only the characteristics, gestures, behaviors, or appearance of the protagonists, but also all of their actions within the scenery, which is presented through the prism of significant details, objects, colors or decorations rather than precise, elaborate descriptions<sup>21</sup>.

Deriving inspiration from Hammett, Gibson stressed the superspecificity of his language. He also pointed to the fact that this is what is missing from descriptions in popular science fiction literature, the majority of which limit themselves to simplifications and generalizations – for example, when a protagonist lands on some distant planet, completely different from Earth, his account of the new land would resemble a sentence like “I looked out the window and saw the air plant”). The author does not seem to care that the reader has no idea what the plant looks like or what it actually is. Thanks to Hammett, Gibson discovered that even in popular literature it is possible to write differently<sup>22</sup>. For instance in the description characterizing Molly, the most important female character in *Neuromancer*, whose appearance inspires associations with characters from *The Maltese Falcon*, such as detective Sam Spade and *femme fatale* Miss Wonderly, as if she was a futuristic hybrid of characters archetypically associated with *noir* aesthetics:

He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial.

[...]

She wore tight black glove leather jeans and a bulky black jacket cut from some matte fabric that seemed to absorb light.

“If I put this dart gun away, will you be easy, Case? You look like you like to take stupid chances.”

“Hey, I’m very easy. I’m a pushover, no problem.”

“That’s fine, man.” The fletcher vanished into the black jacket.

“Because you try to fuck around with me, you’ll be taking one of the stupidest chances of your whole life.”

She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails. She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup>Marco Bellardi, *The Cinematic Mode in Twentieth-Century Fiction. A Comparative Approach*, (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2017), 164.

<sup>22</sup>McCaffery, “An Interview with William Gibson”: 221.

<sup>23</sup>Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 24.



*The Maltese Falcon* is sometimes classified as so-called *cinematic fiction*<sup>24</sup>, although it is hard to say to what extent the author was actually inspired by the cinema (although we do know that he was a fan of contemporary cinema, and later often worked with Hollywood screenwriters). However, it is undeniable that in terms of style and narration his novel displays a strong relationship with the techniques and means of expression that film had at its disposal already in the late 1920s and early 1930s. At the same time, Gibson anticipated the birth of *noir* poetics, which dominated American cinematography in the 1940s and 1950s, only to return in a “revitalized” form as *neo noir*, sometimes combined with science fiction as *tech noir*<sup>25</sup> in the 1980s. This latter tendency can also be seen in *Escape from New York*, and especially in *Blade Runner*, where the expressionist poetics of monochrome pictures, characteristic of *film noir*, was translated into the equally cold shades of blue, juxtaposed with a colorful effusion of neons. The specific visual side of Gibson’s prose reveals a deep relationship between literary cyberpunk and the film style of *tech noir*, for instance in the description of the Jarre de Thé teahouse, “walled with mirrors, each panel framed in red neon”<sup>26</sup>.

The protagonist wants to escape from the overwhelming big city space and set himself free from the weight of his own body, which he sees only as “meat”, lives only for “the bodiless exultation of cyberspace”<sup>27</sup>, where “lines of light” run though “ranged in the nonspace. Like city lights, receding...”<sup>28</sup>. For him this “consensual hallucination” seems like an “unthinkable complexity”<sup>29</sup>, although in descriptions it becomes more concrete mostly in the form of clear graphic equivalents of the urban topography:

A gray disk, the color of Chiba sky was] beginning to rotate, faster, becoming a sphere of paler gray. Expanding – And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distance less home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach<sup>30</sup>.

While reading Gibson’s novel (especially years after it was first published) it is hard not to have an impression that the iconography of the virtual reality that he presented in a way sums up previous imaginings regarding potential technical possibilities of creating worlds that would be an alternative to the “mundane” earthly life. His vision brings associations with the “neon” animations in *TRON* by (1982) Steven Lisberger, about a programmer put

<sup>24</sup>This expression functions in reference to a certain category of works of literature, whose authors to a lesser or greater extent try to use techniques and means of expression characteristic for the cinema, looking for the equivalents of the film language in the written language.

<sup>25</sup>The term *tech noir* derives from the name of a night club bathed in an effusion of neon lights, where the titular cyborg (Arnold Schwarzenegger) from James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (1984) tries to kill Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), the mother of the future leader of a rebellion against machines exterminating humanity.

<sup>26</sup>W. Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 7.

<sup>27</sup>Gibson, 6.

<sup>28</sup>Gibson, 46.

<sup>29</sup>Gibson.

<sup>30</sup>Gibson.

inside a computer, as well as with the psychedelic visualizations of the functioning of the AI in *Demon Seed* (1977) by Donald Cammell, and electronically-generated models of 3D objects in *Escape from New York*.

The association between cyberspace and the film medium was actually suggested by the author – at the beginning of one of his virtual trips, Case sees “hypnagonic images jerking past like film compiled from random frames”<sup>31</sup>. By connecting the computer network directly to his own brain, he becomes a “modernized” equivalent of a viewer, who in the darkness of a screening room detaches themselves from the simply understood reality in order to delve in the space of the film dream.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>31</sup>Gibson.

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# KEYWORDS

## cyberpunk

**ABSTRACT:**

*Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson is considered the first novel representing cyberpunk, a sub-genre of science fiction literature. A vision of a world from some near future, modernized, and at the same time degraded by technology, has been reflected in numerous films. The importance of the role that the cinema itself played in the shaping of the aesthetics of the cyberpunk prose should also be remembered. The example of *Neuromancer* shows that this influence was not limited to inspirations with plots of such films as *Escape from New York* (1981) by John Carpenter, but that – most importantly – it manifested itself in the specifically “cinematic” visuality of Gibson’s literary language.

## science fiction film

## SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE

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# Touching the Past: Jane Campion's *The Piano* as an Example of an Auratic Adaptation

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I started Early – Took my Dog –  
And visited the Sea –  
The Mermaids in the Basement  
Came out to look at me –

And Frigates – in the Upper Floor  
Extended Hempen Hands –  
Presuming Me to be a Mouse –  
Aground – upon the Sands –

But no Man moved Me – till the Tide  
Went past my simple Shoe –  
And past my Apron – and my Belt  
And past my Boddice – too –

And made as He would eat me up –  
 As wholly as a Dew  
 Opon a Dandelion's Sleeve –  
 And then – I started – too –

And He – He followed – close behind –  
 I felt His Silver Heel  
 Opon my Ankle – Then My Shoes  
 Would overflow with Pearl –

Until We met the Solid Town –  
 No One He seemed to know –  
 And bowing – with a Mighty look –  
 At me – The Sea withdrew –<sup>1</sup>

The woman on a beach in Emily Dickinson's poem plays with the elements, invokes deities, and translates the emotions triggered by the morning tide into the rhythm of her footsteps. An everyday relaxing walk turns into a game. It is a race against death,<sup>2</sup> a serious excursion, and an expedition during which the woman probes the limits of civilization, looking into the abyss and facing her inner self ("exorcising and exercising awareness"<sup>3</sup>). It is also a metonymy for an erotic game.<sup>4</sup> All these three interpretive paths overlap, covering the woman's footprints. Walking between the known ("the Solid Town") and the disturbing and the aggressive (the Sea which may eat the woman up), but also the tempting (pearls), the woman follows a path that allows one to mark the boundary of longing and desiring, defining the dynamics between one's world and the world that lies beyond, in the realm of the unknown.

In the poem *I started Early – Took my Dog –*, Dickinson locates the woman between two houses: her house and the house of the sea, which is also divided. Mermaids live in the basement and Frigates sail in the Upper Floor. Thus, an imaginary structure, and perhaps also a hierarchy of intimacy, is imposed on the myth of fluidity. The tiers of the sea correspond to the tiers of man. The rising tide touches and reveals the layers of clothing. This erotic scene is saturated with numerous mythical connotations: it is clear that the Sea rapes the woman. On the other hand, the feet that are immersed in sea foam remind one of the birth of Aphrodite. The poem thus combines self-knowledge with the exploration of one's sexuality.

I would like to compare the rising tide described in the poem to the hands of George Baines, one of the two men competing for Ada, the main character in Jane Campion's *The Piano*. It is his determination and the fact that he manages to acquire Ada's piano – the thing that she cherishes most – that allow him to take advantage of her during their piano lessons and lead to the scene described in the poem, when the touch of the sea moves higher and higher. Ada

<sup>1</sup> E. Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, New York: Faber and Faber, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> J. Reeves, *Preface*, in: E. Dickinson, *Selected Poems*, ed. J. Reeves, London: Heinemann 1959, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> K. Stocks, *Emily Dickinson and the Modern Consciousness*, Houndmills: Macmillan 1988, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> See: L. Wagner-Martin, *Emily Dickinson. A Literary Life*, Palgrave Macmillan 2013, p. 68.

visits George's house and undresses gradually. Every time she recovers one part of her beloved instrument. Let me focus on the scene when George touches Ada for the first time. He lies down under the piano, next to her shoe, which is placed on the pedal, begging and demanding that Ada raise her dress higher and higher. Firstly, and importantly, he sees Ada's bare skin through a tiny hole in her stocking.<sup>5</sup> The close-up on the skin and Baines's dirty fingernail creates an unusual impression on the viewer. Torn underwear and a dirty finger are utterly realistic, but also violate the rules of the romance, the historical *decorum* of seduction. At times, Campion uses naturalistic imagery in a symbolic manner (for example, the mud in which the protagonist keeps collapsing), but also to show how violating the boundaries really feels, as experienced by Ada. In a period drama, as Stella Bruzzi observes, "clothes themselves become significant components of a contrapuntal, sexualized discourse,"<sup>6</sup> and dirt and poverty inscribed in the underwear point to an era of tenderness, which makes itself known when one least expects it.

Indeed, Baines, determined as he is, nevertheless tries to be gentle; he wins Ada over step by step, piece by piece (of clothing), in stages (looking at more and more bare skin). A bit like the sea in Dickinson's poem, but more respectably. Scared, Ada runs away more than once, but she always comes back, even when she wins the entire piano back. Perhaps, especially then. Ada's mythologized poetical origin story as a captive allows us to point to a cultural context (scandalous from the perspective of some feminist interpretations<sup>7</sup>) that emphasizes the will of the victim in a mythical order, insofar as a woman, like a prey, as Jean Paul Roux argues, surrenders herself to the hunter, associated with a predatory cat or bird, with "a smiling look":

A virgin knows how to run away. A mature woman is more likely to be caught: she is not as strong as she used to be and no longer has to defend her virtue. Epic legends and myths tell us a lot about kidnappings – Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen of Troy were all kidnapped – and Herodotus writes (...) ironically "to kidnap women is wrong, but once the deed is done, to make it the basis for serious reprisal is foolish, since clearly the ladies would not have been captured if they were not willing." (...) All peoples with traditional culture know that wild game cannot be captured or killed against its will, then hunting is futile. This is also the case with women. When she fights back, when she wins the race, there is no need to insist. Merlin was in love with Viviane. But he wanted her to come to him voluntarily; he tried to seduce her. He was trying to win her over, and she hated him more and more.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The Piano* (1993), dir. J. Campion, 00:44:40. Henceforth, references to the film are marked directly in the text with the abbreviation P. and information about the hour, minute and second of a given scene.

<sup>6</sup> S. Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema. Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, London: Routledge 1997, p. 36. Bruzzi also discusses the first scene of caressing: "This gesture is, on one level, a very straightforward signal of Baines's desire for Ada, and Ada registers this through the startled but not displeased expression on her face in the subsequent shot. Its eroticism, however, as a cinematic image rather than an idea, is created by the multiple juxtapositions of colour and texture: the two skins (one masculine and swarthy, the other feminine and 'white and hairless as an egg'), the heavy blackness of the stocking, and the delicate, if a little perfunctory, edging on Ada's white petticoat;" *ibidem*, p. xiii.

<sup>7</sup> According to Carolyn Gage, Alisdair Stewart is a "violent rapist," while Baines is a "sleazy rapist." The movie, though it could be a feminist story, "derails into a pro-rape piece of hetero-patriarchal propaganda." Quote after: H. Margolis, "A Strange Heritage": *From Colonization to Transformation?*, in: *Jane Campion's The Piano*, ed. H. Margolis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> J.-P. Roux, *Kobieta w historii i micie* [Woman in myth and history], trans. B. Szczepańska, Warsaw: Volumen 2010, p. 230.



On the one hand, George only seemingly does not resemble powerful mythical kidnappers who often emerge from the sea, or the cynical Paris or London bourgeoisie who spied on women they wished to seduce.<sup>9</sup> His power over Ada, which he gains very quickly, disregarding Ada's husband, stems from his understanding of just how important the piano is for her. Unlike other mythical or bourgeoisie seducers, however, George will relinquish his power. What he gets by forcing a sexual encounter is not what he really wants. In *Campion's* story, the victim is not happy as long as she is forced to come to her tormentor, attracted by the piano. Neither does Baines want it, and perhaps that is why, ultimately, he is wiser (in spite of being uneducated) than the legendary Merlin mentioned by Roux. George is clever and, in many ways, as calculating as Emily Brontë's Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights*, but his gentleness makes him come to terms with losing his beloved, especially when he loses faith that he will be able to get her back.

The director makes an important comment regarding the nature of Ada and George's relationship. Although the New Zealand bush replaces the English moors, both spaces can be considered equally attractive for this tale of love, violence, and longing. In an interview with *Campion*, Miro Bilbough observes that the movie is set at the same time when Brontë wrote her novel and asks the director about the "epochal stream of consciousness," as if surrounding the entire globe. *Campion* observes:

I felt very excited about the kind of passion and romantic sensibility writers like Emily [Brontë] were talking about. I thought it would transpose effortlessly to the situation where I was setting my story, in 1850s New Zealand.

I feel I owe a great debt to the spirit of Emily Brontë. And perhaps not only her, but also Emily Dickinson for other reasons. (...) In a way, Dickinson led such a secret life, and my main character, Ada, does as well. She is secretive not because she closeted herself in a room, but because she won't speak.<sup>10</sup>

Both Ada and George are lonely. They live away from the Solid Town and thus they grow closer. They are both outcasts. When she arrives on the island, Ada is carried to the beach by the crew of the ship, like the piano that is so dear to her, like an object. Uncouth sailors leave her on the beach alone in the company of her daughter, Flora. She spends the night there, awaiting her husband (whom she has not yet met) and her future, whose twists and turns she is not able to foresee (she will be separated from the piano). Like the tide that will surprise both her and Flora. However, along with her husband and Maori porters comes George and it is for him, like the woman in Dickinson's poem, that she will be born out of sea foam. When the man agrees to take her to the beach some time later as a guide and sees her play

<sup>9</sup> See: J. C. Bologne, *Historia uwodzenia. Od Antyku do dziś* [History of seduction: From ancient times to the present], trans. K. Marczevska, Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa 2012, p. 257, 263.

<sup>10</sup> M. Bilbough, J. *Campion*, *The Piano*, in: *Jane Campion Interviews*, ed. V. W. Wexman, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1999, p. 115. Contemporary critics agree that "secrecy," the importance of which *Campion* emphasizes in this quote, is an important common denominator for both authors. Margaret Homans observes: "Even so, none of the women poets of that era led what anyone would call an ordinary life. Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson embraced the limitations of their circumstances, Brontë resenting every excursion outside her father's home and Dickinson cultivating an even greater seclusion," M. Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity. Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1980, p. 16.

the piano among the elements, a feeling will arise and a game will begin, which Campion will show throughout the entire movie.

Over the last thirty years, *The Piano* has been subjected to great critical attention and the interpretations of the movie allow one to disregard the obvious in the act of careful reading.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, however, it is difficult to fully discuss a work that aims to elude the viewer and critical interpretations. "They shut me up in Prose –/ As when a little Girl/ They put me in the Closet –/ Because they liked me 'still' –," writes Dickinson in one of her poems, pointing to the philosophical problem of framing/interpreting a subject, against which Ada's story can also be read. Dickinson juxtaposes prose and the economic, yet intense, language of her poetry. Prose, of course, does not refer to the narrative as such, but begs the question of the novel as a point of reference, which has influenced greatly the nature of literary and artistic communication, as analyzed by Walter Benjamin. Indeed, changes described by Benjamin are reflected in the changes in the visual arts at the turn of the last century, which we can also notice in *The Piano*. According to Ryszard Rózanowski:

The rise of the novel in the modern era is for Benjamin one of the first signs of the decline of the art of storytelling as the transmission of experience. (...) The spoken word ceases to be *the* privileged medium, the story does not require the privileged presence of the storyteller, and the reader is as lonely as the author. Novels are no longer told.<sup>12</sup>

For Benjamin experiencing art *in statu nascendi* was crucial. Thus, he argued that the development of print and the privatization of reading mark the beginning of cultural transformations whose counterpart in the visual arts was the invention of photography and then its "coming to life" in the medium of film. Benjamin famously argued that losing contact with the artist, and the technical reproduction of a work of art which gained immense popularity in the twentieth century, would mark the end of aura. In his famous essay, still considered an important point of reference for culture and film studies scholars, he wrote:

*The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the traditional value of the cultural heritage.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>See: among others, the above-cited collected volume *Jane Campion's The Piano*. In Poland, one of first academic interpretations by Elżbieta Ostrowska may be found in *Sztuka interpretacji klasycznych i współczesnych dzieł filmowych* [The art of interpreting classical and contemporary films], Łódź 1995.

<sup>12</sup>R. Rózanowski, *Pasaże Waltera Benjamina. Studium myśli* [Walter Benjamin's Passages: A study of thought], Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 1997, pp. 199-200.

<sup>13</sup>W. Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, in: *idem, Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books 1969, p. 4.

Despite its ambition to adapt, film contributes to the process of liquidating the value of cultural capital. Indeed, Benjamin's observations are important, though not crucial, for film. As Laura U. Marks writes:

I argue that film or video may be considered to have aura, because it is a material artifact of the object it has witnessed. Thus cinema functions like a fetish, in the anthropological sense described by William Pietz: an object whose power to represent something comes by virtue of prior contact with it.<sup>14</sup>

In the movie, in which the titular piano is a fetish, the fictitious nature of the story could essentially weaken its aura: in her research on tactile cinema, Marks focuses primarily on documents or movies which merge fiction and non-fiction. At this point, however, we should comment on the intertextual network, which provides context for Campion's story.

I admire Dickinson and Brontë, the sensibility their bring to their work and to the world. Both were recluses and they held their sensibility at some cost to themselves. In some way, I feel I am a kind of charlatan who can live in the world quite happily because I'm quite sociable. I use and put their labour into a more popular and acceptable form, and sometimes I feel guilty as I think it's corrupted use of their pure wisdom.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, the theme of depreciating the present in relation to the "golden nineteenth century" encourages one to refer to Georg Steiner and his cultural diagnoses concerning the present. However, the fact that Campion only feels "guilty" for a little while allows us to re-examine this adaptation of the sensibilities of writers who are important to her. In the context of the expressed kinship and uncertainty, we can once again pose the question of (re)creating aura as the secret ambition of those who set their narratives in the past, creating stories that try to capture the "real presence" of the past, even if the only tools we have are interpretive speculations on fleeting experiences recorded in literature, giving rise to an intertextual game. When an artistic undertaking is inspired by focused reflection on the past, which, thanks to heirlooms and written documents, can be visualized, the seemingly irretrievable may become the subject of aesthetic pursuits.

Adapting the era that is long gone, making sure that its vision and the cognitive abilities of the contemporary recipient are in sync, confronting the viewer with history: this is the starting point for arranging material signs of the past in order to better understand the community of horizons that connect the present with the past. The dream to capture the aura of the times works against the current of changes that, in Benjamin's view, lead to the loss of aura by works of art. The spirit of post-auratic times is inextricably linked to the hope of evoking presence. Paradoxically, therefore, the reproducibility of a work of art and the lack of control over its final form force much more focused directing, which brings to life something that is as powerful as a real historical artifact. Indeed, it is not a specific text that is adapted, but

<sup>14</sup>L. U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*, Durham: Duke University Press 2000, pp. 20-21.

<sup>15</sup>*Jane Campion Interviews*, op. cit., p. 116.

rather a synergy of a series of readerly experiences, which are arranged into a plot similar to the ones generated in a given epoch, and yet different. Such an approach may, in particular, help us understand how effective collective artistic endeavors (film, comic book, theater) are, insofar as many creative voices create a single (more or less coherent) work of art.

\* \* \*

Interestingly, at the beginning of *The Piano* the viewer may experience a perceptual dissonance. The viewer may take a moment to realize that the first look at the world is a look through someone's fingers. The heroine is looking at the world and so is the viewer – with her, thanks to her. Indeed, in a sense, also with anxiety and fear (covering the face, not looking as an expression of fear), with a playful intention (hide and seek). “The voice you hear,” a child says off camera, “is not my speaking voice but my mind's voice” [P. 00:01:15]. This is a paradoxical statement. A character who is, in so many ways, so secretive, at the same time wants to tell us about herself. The first time we see Ada – huddled up under a tree like a child – is as symbolic as when we see her arrive on the beach, anticipating life planned by someone else. At the same time, when the woman and her daughter wait together on the beach, we see (aesthetic) hope, shown in/as a spot of light created by a makeshift tent-lantern in the dusk. We focus on it and remember it; it stands out like the piano which emerged from the sea onto an empty beach.

Campion forces the viewer to experience the whole spectrum of emotions in these opening scenes: with Ada, they are looking curiously through their fingers at Ada's daughter who is learning how to ride a pony; with Ada, they recoil from the hostess's stern gaze at her father's house, refusing to play the piano; with Ada, they feel disgust when they watch her child vomit and the sailors urinate on the beach. Cinematic image and sound work together, striving to show the physical dimension of both experiences, including disgust, which mark important stages of this journey. According to Carol Jacobs, “[t]he film urges us to look. Like the dog coaxed from under the veranda during a heavy rainstorm, we are bound to get wet.”<sup>16</sup> The haptic nature of the aesthetic experience may be trivialized, but, on the other hand, the political nature of Campion's film invites metaphors which suggest involvement on the part of the viewer. From the very first scene, Campion plays with the sense of touch, showing a world that, in synergy with touch, may be “told” in a story, and perhaps – recreated – in/as realistic mimesis and romantic evocation.

Fingers and touch are indeed important: in the movie, fingers touch the piano keys, the past (with Flora's father) and the present (with George). Sensual interactions start with details, close-ups; Campion shows both moments of fulfillment and moments of disappointment. For example, in one excellent scene Stewart has tea with Aunt Morag and questions his wife's mental health because he saw her “playing the piano” on a table. A discreet conversation, with other people present (including Baines, who is listening, holding his cup of tea), is combined with a subtle play of objects that relieve anxiety (fan, tea). On the other hand, such ob-

<sup>16</sup>C. Jacobs, *Playing Jane Campion's Piano: Politically*, “MLN” 1994, vol. 109, no. 5, p. 759.

jects also mask the fear of going mad. There are two important shots at the end of this scene: a close-up of Morag's hand placed against her heart, shown through the fan that is vibrating nervously, and Alisdair's cup, shown from above (from his tilted perspective), as he stirs his tea. Alisdair says that silence can be considered a good thing, hoping that in time his wife will show him more affection [P. 00:28:15]. Stewart's fear for his wife going insane is similar to Linton's fear for Catherine, since nothing can stop her from longing for Wuthering Hills and Heathcliff, especially at night. It is also a reflection of cultural violence, thus described by Emily Dickinson in one of the poems chosen by Campion

Much Madness is divinest Sense –  
 To a discerning Eye –  
 Much Sense – the starkest Madness –  
 'Tis the Majority  
 In this, as all, prevail –  
 Assent – and you are sane –  
 Demur – you're straightway dangerous –  
 And handled with a Chain –<sup>17</sup>

Let us focus on "a discerning Eye." It is a telling metaphor in the context of the movie, which may, after all, embody Dickinson's early modern spiritual diagnoses. The discerning eye is a key to Campion's *Piano*. The "discussion over tea" defines the categories that Ada must accept or reject, but it is obvious from the very beginning that she is not of this world, that the categories of her husband, who leaves the piano on the beach, are not hers. When Ada wants her instrument back, she is accused of "mental retardation." Such a diagnosis was to be expected in a colonial household. The fact that music is a language in which Ada communicates will be revealed to Stewart's interlocutor, Aunt Morag, only later, when she will talk to Nessie about how music may physically move a person. Even this, however, will be an offense in a world where art is and will remain only a distraction or a form of entertainment.

When Alisdair and Aunt Morag talk about Ada's mental state, Baines is able to come up with his plan to take over the piano and win Ada's affection. Campion suggests a series of romantic (crazy) reevaluations in this scene. After all, objects communicate emotions, fears, and hopes of the characters: for instance, they tremble, showing just how insecure the characters are.<sup>18</sup> In the next scene, we see an ax. It functions as an ordinary everyday object, as a symbol of punishment for curiosity and promiscuity in a staging of the story of Bluebeard, and, finally, as a tool of real punishment inflicted on Ada. Thus, Campion will set the scene for her drama: a drama in which people and objects play at times equal roles. *The Piano* is one of those movies in which, as Marks writes, "haptic images may encourage a more embodied and multisensory

<sup>17</sup>E. Dickinson, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>18</sup>It is an interesting sequence, because the colonial space of this elegant "living room" is expressed through such traditional pieces as a fan, a tea set, furniture. What the characters talk about, Ada's alleged mental problems, is also connected with something you would find in a living room, namely a piano. However, since the instrument is so big, it is left outside, in the wild. Ada is "othered" despite her potential affinity with what the colonists aspire to.

relationship to the image” because “in combination with sound, camera movement, and montage, [it] achieve[s] sensuous effects.”<sup>19</sup>

At this point, let me return to Benjamin, whose theory was reformulated by Marks, allowing us to re-examine objects reproduced on film. Although they are detached from their time, they do not have to lose their cultural authenticity and the ability to mark the past (especially communal past). Everyday and ordinary life and ordinariness as such, present even in the most spectacular epic, characterize every epoch. Rózanowski argues:

Benjamin liked mystery, but at the same time he was fascinated by the most inconspicuous details, ordinary objects belonging to the everyday world. It was not so much a manifestation of a personal inclination as a method by means of which he hoped, on the one hand, to present the sudden transformation of interior space into exterior space, and, on the other hand, to present the familiar and the common as the unrecognized or as the misrecognized.<sup>20</sup>

Importantly, Ada’s New Zealand adventure is a journey from the inside (her hidden, mediated voice) to the outside: from the depths of the “soul,” whatever it may be, symbolically shown at the beginning, the viewer moves towards a sensual experience of reality, from deep and sticky mud, to the ecstasy of love and the naked body of a lover. The love provoked (it is a better word than “awakened”) by Baines grows out of the sensual; in order to get to know Ada’s secret (perhaps Baines discovers it when he first goes to the beach with Ada and Flora), Baines has to touch her skin. Subtle as it may be, through a tiny hole in her stocking, the touch moves Ada. The theme of romantic love is thus rendered more complex through the reference to nineteenth-century biological theories of experiencing the world. And although the fact that Baines is “wild” and “anti-bourgeois” (he is close with the Maori people) is in keeping with the conventions of the nineteenth-century romance (this trope was used by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights*<sup>21</sup>), it is how he communicates with the woman he loves that confirms that the “hunter” and the “prey” are (inter)connected. In-between two houses, as if in Brontë’s novel, Ada must finally discover who she is. In one narcissistic scene, she takes a long look at her face in the mirror, which she then kisses, thus finally awakening and recognizing herself. Her lover did the same first.

By making this story of a romantic conquest, on the one hand, an undertaking which, as in Brontë’s novel, is closely related to the economic realities of a specific community and, on the other hand, a relationship in which understanding the carriers of feelings and values is of great importance, Campion manages to do both, adapt the spirit of the mid-nineteenth century and reflect on the very act of storytelling. Let us refer to Niklas Luhmann in order to better understand how the use of nineteenth-century novelistic and poetic emotional codes brings to life an auraptation – a fictional story set in the past:

<sup>19</sup>L. U. Marks, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>20</sup>R. Rózanowski, op. cit., pp. 216-217.

<sup>21</sup>See: C. P. Riu, *Two Gothic Feminist Texts: Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights and the film, The Piano, by Jane Campion*, “Atlantis” 2000, vol. XXII, no. 1, pp. 163-173.

The function of love as a medium of communication is to enable the otherwise improbable. In colloquial language, this function is encoded as “understanding;” it comes to the fore when it comes to the desire to understand and where the impossibility to understand forces us to transcend the immediately possible. Since attempts are made to move beyond simple observation, it becomes understandable why all objective, generalized determinants of love, such as merit, beauty, and virtue, are ultimately rejected, and the principle of making the unlikely possible is increasingly personalized. The medium makes use of a person. It is necessary to know it as well as possible in order to grasp or even assume what constitutes its own world and what functions as a comparative scheme.<sup>22</sup>

Luhmann also points out that the desubstantization of the subject in the eighteenth century means that “the Other must be recognized in relation to his environment and to himself.”<sup>23</sup> This change, on which *The Piano*, as a period drama, also comments, may be discussed in relation to the aesthetic agreement Campion negotiates in her film. If we combine the question of the medium, presented in the film through the prism of a fetishized instrument, with Benjamin’s fear of depersonalizing the relationship with a work of art at the turn of the twentieth century, it can be suggested that Ada’s story, with its focus on (mis)communication, among other things, presents a new type of aesthetic experience which attempts to recreate the bond with (it seems) the lost forms of the sensuous.

We can see this in how the characters look at one another and at themselves (in a mirror). The motif of wedding photography used by Campion and the accompanying scenes of dress fittings point to the nineteenth-century culture of the spectacle; when the characters look at themselves, Campion frames their experiences in the context of new “ways of seeing,” first witnessed in the nineteenth century. As one of the characters suggests, a photograph may make up for the fact that the wedding ceremony did not take place. However, we realize that it is not true when we notice the sad look on Ada’s face: she sees her reflection in the mirror dressed in a white dress and, at the same time, the viewer also notices the second gaze reflected in the mirror: that of Flora, who is grumpy, angry, full of remorse [P. 00:16:15]. The girl has the right to be angry for a number of reasons, but we are able to fully understand only the one she expresses: she wished to be in the photo; she needed attention (her rebellion against her mother and betrayal will eventually grow out of dissatisfaction). The photograph that is to seal Ada’s fate puts an end to the child’s presence and manipulates history, replacing the real experience of the wedding ceremony with an artifact. At the same time, however, it is an attempt to recall those early portraits, which for Benjamin still had an aura, despite the dehumanizing eye of the camera. However, Campion shows us the eye that is looking through the lens, inspiring reflection on the mediated experience captured in a reproducible work of art. This reflection starts with a recognition, insofar as the viewer (instead of the photographer) is suddenly very much present on the “margins” of the scene that is about to be cut and edited. Indeed, like the dog in Jacobs’s metaphor, the viewer is to feel the discomfort of being exposed to rain, combined with Ada’s anger at

<sup>22</sup>N. Luhmann, *Semantyka miłości* [The semantics of love], trans. J. Łoziński, in: *Antropologia ciała. Wybór tekstów* [The anthropology of the body: Selected texts], ed. M. Szpakowska, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2008, p. 244.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibidem*.

being there in the first place: in New Zealand, in front of Stewart's house, in the mud, in the rain, in front of the camera.

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the objectivity of visual experience was first questioned.<sup>24</sup> Advances in the psychology of perception made in the last decades of the long century provide context for Benjamin's perspective. Old epistemological models were questioned, and new philosophical concepts of the subject were born. Indeed, new art was born as well, one that reflected these experiences. As Dorota Łuczak observes:

the breakdown of the *a priori* cognitive unity of the world is associated with the emergence of a contingent and psychological capacity for synthesis and association. This means that the perception of the whole world is replaced by shifting relations of forces beyond the control of the subject.<sup>25</sup>

Campion shows such awakened desires discreetly. When Ada leaves the house, after Alisdair asks her to play "a song," the camera shows her through the window as she wanders around the muddy yard. The camera zooms in on Ada's back and her hands folded behind her, and finally, the back of her head through which the viewer apparently enters a silent forest, insofar as the scene ends with this image [P. 01:07:37]. Alisdair does not understand Ada, who refuses to use the piano for his entertainment; what the instrument has become in recent weeks, what it meant for her earlier, makes her husband's request sacrilegious. Ada eludes the role that her husband assigns to her; she escapes to the edge of the bush. Perhaps it is there, if we look for interpretative support in Dickinson's poetry, that she bonds with the Absolute that is otherwise absent in *The Piano*. Musical genius, superimposed on the prosthetic nature of the piano, can perhaps be revealed thanks to the last verses of the poem "He fumbles at your Soul":

He fumbles at your Soul  
As Players at the Keys  
Before they drop full Music on –  
He stuns you by degrees –  
Prepares your brittle Nature  
For the Ethereal Blow  
By fainter Hammers—further heard –  
Then nearer – Then so slow

<sup>24</sup>"We are fully aware today that photography is not a neutral registration of the visible, but the product of a device designed specifically for the visual recording and ordering of certain aspects – and only certain aspects – of the external world. In addition, the cameraperson makes choices and decisions (regarding the motive, framing, optics, photo emulsion, posing, not to mention all decisions regarding prints) which influence the photographic image. When the photograph appeared, it was seen as an unquestionable representation of what is, a positive truth. Photography and photographic representation enjoyed unconditional trust;" Henri Zerner, *Spojrzenie artystów* [The gaze of the artist], in: *Historia ciała. T. 2. Od rewolucji do I wojny światowej* [The history of the body: Volume 2: Since the revolution to WW1], ed. A. Corbin, trans. K. Belaid, T. Stróżyński, Gdańsk: słow/obraz terytoria 2013, p. 99.

<sup>25</sup>D. Łuczak, *Foto-oko. Wizja fotograficzna wokół okulocentryzmu w sztuce I połowy XX wieku* [Photo-eye: Photographic vision around oculocentrism in the art of the first half of the 20th century], Kraków: Universitas 2018, pp. 136-137.



Your Breath has time to straighten –  
 Your Brain – to bubble Cool –  
 Deals – One – imperial – Thunderbolt –  
 That scalps your naked Soul –

When Winds take Forests in the Paws—  
 The Universe – is still —<sup>26</sup>

Ada is possessed by naturalistic, sensual desires. This vision is combined with a harmonious suspension: ecstasy? An orgasm? In Campion's movie, nudity is won, guarded, and revealed to the wrong person. It evokes key love myths found in Western civilization, while at the same time demonstrating that the brilliant moviemakers wished to, above all, seduce the viewer. The prosthetic character of the piano as the voice at the heart of the story and the actual prosthesis that Baines makes for Ada in her "posthumous" life complete the list of nineteenth-century fictional themes which center around giving a sensual form to fleeting dreams. As Antoine de Becque observes:

cinema records bodies and tells stories through them, which means it makes bodies sick, monstrous and – sometimes at the same time – very pleasant and attractive. A raw record, similarly to locating in fiction, relies on this disease and its beauty, which take the form of a terrifying disfigurement or a perfect transformation. Frankenstein's monster, in a way, is to film fiction what *L'Arroseur arrose* is to the French scenes filmed by the Lumière brothers: the bodily accident that gives rise to the story. Popular cinematographers understood this very early on, even before the great producers of silent movies: the viewer comes to see the body on the screen, so if possible, it should be strange, frightening, impressive, wonderful, perverse, delightful. It is a direct and obligatory relation: the body on the screen is the first trace of the faith in the spectacle and, at the same time, the place where the spectacular is revealed above all else.<sup>27</sup>

Even though from today's perspective we want to argue with the fact that art, in keeping with Benjamin's diagnosis, is detached from romantic sources of presence, the experience of cinema that emerges from it is much more sensual and haptic. Postmodern adaptation embraces the re-evaluative desires and the fetishistic feelings of the author of *Passages*. It also grows out of the spirit of the last *fin-de-siècle* and the moment in which the process of remaking and adapting gains, as Julie Sanders has shown, "a specific rhythm and meaning." Indeed, "late twentieth-century postmodernist theory (...) has made us intensely aware of the processes of intervention and interpretation involved in any engagement with existent art forms."<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, we have also re-negotiated the need for subjectivity in a work of art, the human element, tangibility. For "the new Victorians," *The Piano* displays these two late twentieth-century tendencies perfectly:

<sup>26</sup>E. Dickinson, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

<sup>27</sup>A. de Baecque, *Ekrany. Ciało w kinie* [Screens: The body in film], in: *Historia ciała. Tom 3. Różne spojrzenia. Wiek XX* [The history of the body: Volume 3: Different perspectives: The 20<sup>th</sup> century] ed. J.-J. Courtine, trans. K. Belaid and T. Stróżyński, Gdańsk: słow/obraz terytoria 2014, pp. 349-350.

<sup>28</sup>J. Sanders, *Adaptation and appropriation*, Abington and New York: Routledge 2006, p. 148.

From its title to the fetishized object of that title, from the haunting, at times overpowering musical score to the notion of speech suppressed, sound and its absence infuse *The Piano* with a surreal aura of emotional intensity. Holly Hunter's piano solos function as forcefully in the film as does her ability to convey a wide range of emotions in absolute silence. Like her character Ada's self-enforced muteness, the presence of evocative "natural" sounds functions almost as a persona – ocean waves crash on barren shores, incessant rain pounds rooftops, exotic birds call through thick forests in counterpoint to the lack of human conversation. As well, Campion's reliance on the act of seeing as a cinematic device marks both knowing and the refusal to know, what can be seen and what must not be. Perception thus appears to order the film's visual ontology, paralleling its insistently emotive soundtrack.<sup>29</sup>

Du Puis uses the word "aura" but not in Benjamin's sense. However, thanks to the theoretical reevaluation made by Marks, it may be applied in the context described above, concerned with discovering experiences in a plot saturated with symbolic artifacts framed by historical intertexts. "The auratic character of things," Marks writes, "is their ability not simply to awaken memories in an individual, but to contain a social history in fragmentary form."<sup>30</sup>

In Campion's movie, the relationship between image and sound, as means of expression, redefines the ways in which these dimensions are intertwined in life. Such aesthetic and cinematic foundations of experience allow us to draw on anachronistic, from the perspective of the author of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, ways of experiencing works of art. In auraptation, the viewer's gaze, interacting with characters and spaces, reactivates, by means of a medium that was originally supposed to put an end to aura, elements of aesthetic experience from the transitional era, from the nineteenth century. The self-awareness of the nineteenth century allows moviemakers to symbolically reconstruct, playing with themes related to the technical possibilities of the new media, an intense sense of presence. Careful references to nineteenth-century culture, especially the works of Dickinson and Brontë, and close-ups, combined with Ada's story, who enters a new exotic world (in all its meanings), create a structure of tensions which unveils what has remained hidden for a long time. Indeed, after over a hundred years, thanks to the (re)construction of fictional historical plots, Campion opens the door to the nineteenth century.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>29</sup>R. du Puis, *Romanticizing Colonialism. Power and Pleasure in Jane Campion's The Piano*, "The Contemporary Pacific" 1996, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup>L. U. Marks, op. cit., p. 120.

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# KEYWORDS

adaptation

*materiality*

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## ABSTRACT:

In this article, I attempt to define a new phenomenon in world contemporary cinema. Thanks to new visual means of expression, with a focus on their haptic nature, film tries to recreate moods and sensitivities associated with the past. As an informed reading of Emily Dickinson's poetry and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Jane Campion's *The Piano* becomes an example of a plot that is, on the one hand, filled with perspectives, motifs and situations from these works and, on the other hand, thanks to the stylistic multisensory nature of cinema, recreates the nineteenth-century dynamics of relations and moods recorded in historical sources in specific characters and objects. Thus, it becomes an auraptation (auraptation: auratic adaptation), an adaptation of the aura found in the literary testimonies of a given epoch. It translates a story that was not created in the nineteenth century into the present and the contemporary media.

## INTERTEXTUALITY

*women's film and writing*

## 19TH CENTURY FETISH

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# The Cinematic Nature of the Literary World Represented in Marco Vichi's Crime Novel *Death in August* (*The First Inspector Bordelli Mystery*)

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This issue of *Forum of Poetics* is devoted to *The cinematic materiality of literature* and, at first glance, this theme seems problematic. First of all, literature has inspired filmmakers for years, representing in detail what film (re)used later. Filmmakers have often experimented with intermedial editing; for example, Quentin Jerome Tarantino used subtitles, toying with the idea of “chapter titles” and “chapter contents,” in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009). Secondly, it would be much easier to study literary techniques in film than *vice versa*. Thirdly, literature was remarkably “cinematic” ages ago, before film was invented, so how can we prove that film influenced literature? The fragmentary nature of Ludovico Ariosto's works (e.g. *Orlando Furioso*, 1551) and works inspired by Ariosto, such as nineteenth-century digressive poems, are essentially “cinematic,” at least insofar as this word could be understood in the past centuries. Likewise, fragmentation, detail, imagery, and, above all, a narrative strategy in which a camera seems to moves from one scene to another, are present in some of the most famous European po-

ems, such as Torquato Tasso's *The Liberation of Jerusalem* (1581)<sup>1</sup> and Antoni Malczewski's *Maria* (1825).<sup>2</sup> However, *Maria* has not yet been adapted into a movie, perhaps because of its philosophical, reflective, and metaphysical nature. These are all examples of literature from the "pre-cinematic" era. Respectively, cinematic perspectives, e.g. the worm's-eye view or the bird's-eye view, had been used in novels long before the invention of film. For example, in the opening of Bolesław Prus's *Placówka* [The Outpost] everything is shown from a bird's eye view, in a sequence of more and more detailed "close-ups."<sup>3</sup> Today, such a technique is often used in films.

In literature, fragmentation and a dynamic structure are most closely associated with the poetics of film. There are many works which employ fragmentation, inspired by cinematic techniques. For example, Leopold Tyrmand's *Zły* [Bad] or Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Kamienna noc* [Stone night] are said to employ cinematic "fragmentary" poetics.<sup>4</sup> The classic example of drawing inspiration from the big screen is John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930–1936), in regards to both the books' structure and narration. Dos Passos imitates film editing and employs a so-called "camera eye."<sup>5</sup> However, interestingly, the trilogy has been adapted into a radio play, a stage play, an audiobook, and even a song, but it has not been adapted into a movie. The reverse is true for literature that is said to be "unadaptable" and yet has been turned into a movie. For example, Dorota Masłowska in her prose plays with language and not imagery or visuality.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą białą-czerwoną* [Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag] has been adapted into a movie.<sup>7</sup>

Adventure and action novels are easy to adapt. We can show different groups of people and different plotlines. Therefore, the realistic or the naturalistic novel, such as Bolesław Prus's *Doll* or Reymont's *Chłopi* [Peasants], are extremely "cinematic," since they present the reader with an extreme long shot of society. They also describe the represented world in great detail.

<sup>1</sup> It has been adapted into a movie a couple of times, e.g. Enrico Guazzoni, *La Gerusalemme liberata*, historical drama, silent movie (Portugal, 1919); Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, *La Gerusalemme liberata* (*The Mighty Crusaders*), drama – adventure – action movie (France – Italy, 1958). Piotr Salwa and Krzysztof Żaboklicki write about the visual aspect and theatricality of the poem. Piotr Salwa and Krzysztof Żaboklicki, *Średniowiecze, renesans, barok* [Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque], vol. 1, *Historia literatury włoskiej* [History of Italian Literature] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 2006), 302–4.

<sup>2</sup> On "editing" and Karol Irzykowski's plans to adapt *Maria* into a movie see: e.g. Marek Bieńczyk, "Estetyka melancholii" [The aesthetics of melancholy], in *Trzynaście arcydzieł romantycznych* [Thirteen Romantic masterpieces], ed. Elżbieta Kiślak and Marek Gumkowski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1996), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Bolesław Prus, *Placówka* [The Outpost] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1975), 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Wacław Forajter, *Zły Leopolda Tyrmanda jako literatura środka: tekst i konteksty* [Leopold Tyrmand's *Zły* as literature of the middle: Text and contexts] (Kraków: Universitas, 2007), 93; Klaudia Pilarska, "How Much Crime Novel is there in the Crime Novel? On Genre Reflexivity in Gaja Grzegorzewska's *Stony Night*", *Forum of Poetics*, no. 13 (2018): 26–41.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Hock, "'Stories Told Sideways Out of the Big Mouth': Dos Passos's Bazinian Camera Eye", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 33,1 (2005): 20–27; Justin Edwards, "The Man with a Camera Eye: Cinematic Form and Hollywood Malediction in John Dos Passos's 'The Big Money'", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 27,4 (1999): 245–54.

<sup>6</sup> Zofia Mitosek, *Poznanie (w) powieści – od Balzaka do Masłowskiej* [Getting to know (in) the novel – from Balzac to Masłowska] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2003); Maciej Stroiński, "Wojna polsko-ruska z flagą i bez flagi" [Polish-Russian War with and without the flag], in *Od Mickiewicza do Masłowskiej. Adaptacje filmowe literatury polskiej* [From Mickiewicz to Masłowska. Film adaptations of Polish literature], ed. Tadeusz Lubelski (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2014), 413.

<sup>7</sup> Dorota Masłowska, *Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą białą-czerwoną* [Polish-Russian War under White-Red Flag] (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2003).

Indeed, some novels are more “visual” than movies. This also applies to crime novels. Thus, perhaps some visual techniques found in crime novels come to life under the influence of cinema and film? Maybe what is ephemeral and fragmentary in film becomes a clear, colorful, and moving image in the novel?

My goal in this article is very specific. I aim to demonstrate how camera angles and representations of the setting are translated into the ways in which spaces and people are described in the crime novel. I shall analyze Marco Vichi's *Death in August*.<sup>8</sup> I shall focus on the subjective perspective, which we see primarily in a third-person yet subjective narration (i.e. specific for every character). When we look at the world through the eyes of a given character it is as if we are looking at the world through the camera eye: it moves from one scene, place, and person to another; the camera angles change constantly, as we move from wide shots to close-ups, focusing on details and micro-details and then zooming out again. This form of visual narration is characteristic of the crime novel, and I shall argue that this is because of the subjective third-person narration, which employs film techniques; in other words, film techniques have clearly influenced such a form of narration. The subjective third-person narration registers and “records” the world like a camera.

### The third-person subjective narration and the subjective camera

The third-person subjective narration (*personale Erzählung*)<sup>9</sup> is like a subjective camera: we see the world with the character's eyes. It is a literal, sensual, and sometimes even behavioral look at the world represented in a given work, insofar as the reader imagines what the character sees (hears, feels). We achieve the same affect in film with the use of the subjective camera. Joseph V. Mascelli observes that:

The subjective camera films from a personal viewpoint. The audience participates in the screen action as a personal experience. The viewer is placed in the picture, either on his own as an active participant, or by trading places with a person in the picture and seeing the event through his eyes.<sup>10</sup>

This technique adds to the overall dramatic effect: the subjective camera makes scenes more dramatic, especially when it is used interchangeably with the objective camera. The subjective camera “may be employed to denote a sudden switch to a player's subconscious, retrospective (...).<sup>11</sup> The subjective camera may be employed in a twofold manner. For one:

When subjective shots previously described are preceded by a close-up of a person looking off-screen, the viewer will comprehend that he is seeing what the screen player sees. The shot itself

<sup>8</sup> Marco Vichi, *Death in August (The First Inspector Bordelli Mystery)*, trans. by Stephen Sartarelli (London: Hachette, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Franz K. Stanzel, *Die typischen Erzählsituationen im Roman: dargestellt an Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, The Ambassadors, Ulysses u.a.*, Wiener Beiträge zur englischen Philologie (Wien; Stuttgart: Braumüller, 1955).

<sup>10</sup> Joseph V. Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography* (Los Angeles: Silman-James Press), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Mascelli, 137.



may be filmed in precisely the same manner, but the viewer is no longer on his own — he has traded positions with the on-screen player to view the event as he sees it.<sup>12</sup>

Respectively:

Point-of-view, or simply p.o.v, camera angles record the scene from a particular player's viewpoint. The point-of-view is an objective angle, but since it falls between the objective and subjective angle, it should be placed in a separate category and given special consideration.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that whenever emotions, judgments, irony, humor, and nostalgia – so characteristic of the Inspector – are described, we are dealing with the subjective camera. In the case of more objective descriptions, as if from the point of view of a character, we can talk about the influence of the P.O.V. (point of view). These two strategies – the subjective camera and the P.O.V. – are often used interchangeably:

The inspector continued poking about. Pushing open a door, he entered a sizeable room with several glass-paned chests and a large round table in the middle. On the walls, a few fine melancholy, rustic landscapes. A pair of huge white oxen caught his eye, and he drew near. He wasn't mistaken: a Fattori. But the surprises weren't over yet. Farther ahead there were some Segantinis, a Nomellini, not to mention Signorini, Ghiglia, Bartolena, and others. Bordelli let himself be hypnotized by the colors, though every so often the dead woman's nose would reappear in his mind. He ran his hand over his face to wipe away the image, and went out of the room to continue his tour.

A large, very clean kitchen, a dusty sitting room, a tea room, bookcases, servants' quarters, a variety of strangely scented bathrooms. There was no end to the house. Going up to the first floor, he opened every door, finding only spacious, half-empty rooms with ceilings frescoed in seventeenth-century naïf style, enormous carpets and dust-laden crystal chandeliers. In the biggest room, a dark piece of furniture towered like a tabernacle against the shiny, yellowish plaster.

It was hotter on the second floor. All the rooms were completely empty but one, in which it seemed that all the furniture had been stored. Wardrobes filled to bursting with clothes wrapped in plastic, shelves with dozens of pairs of shoes, mouse-eaten armchairs, bedside tables, light fixtures, nightlights. On one chair was a wooden box with *Osborne 1934*<sup>14</sup> written on it. It was full of old greeting cards. Too bad. Bordelli would have been glad to drink some strong alcohol. He squeezed the crumpled packet of cigarettes in his pocket, to convince himself it was truly empty. He felt like smoking again.

Wending his way through the chaos, he bumped a vase with his elbow, tried to catch it on the fly, but it eluded his grasp and fell to the floor with a crash, shattering into a thousand pieces. At once he was struck by the stillness in the house, which so contrasted with the noise a moment before. It was disturbed only by the creaking of the old furniture. Half closing his eyes from weariness,

<sup>12</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 13-14.

<sup>13</sup>Mascelli, 21.

<sup>14</sup>Osborne is a producent of fine sherries and port.

he sat down in the middle of an old sofa, spreading his arms like a Christ, then extending them along the edge of the back and dropping his head backwards. A faded frieze of intersecting lines ran along the upper parts of the walls, just below the angle of intersection with the ceiling. Bordelli wondered how many people had touched these walls, walked on these floors, used this furniture. There was nothing new, in short. He thought about all the babies that had been born in this big house, all the dead laid into their coffins.<sup>15</sup>

The “camera” seems to follow Bordelli and his gaze. The reader sees what he sees; he enters the same rooms as the detective. Such a technique of showing space may be found in many films, especially road movies, but also crime movies, horror films,<sup>16</sup> and thrillers, insofar as showing the protagonist (from the so-called audience’s point of view<sup>17</sup>) interchangeably with the p.o.v. camera angles fuels fear. *Death in August* is not a horror movie or a thriller; neither is it an adventure novel. The analyzed quotation demonstrates how space and its exploration are recorded. The perceived space is almost always in front of the main character’s eyes. Vichi is the master of the long shot:<sup>18</sup> he describes the setting – a villa whose owner was murdered – like a brilliant screenwriter (and he is also a screenwriter<sup>19</sup>). Bordelli discovers her body. The reader is exposed to both the “audience’s point of view” and a situation in which “the camera acts as the viewer’s eyes.”<sup>20</sup> The first sentence in the above quote reads as if it were recorded by “the objective camera” and then it turns into “the subjective camera.” Descriptions of frescoes and ornaments on the ceiling, in turn, correspond to the so-called low-angle shot, in which the camera records the world as if “from below.”

A low-angle shot is any shot in which the camera is tilted upward to view the subject. A low angle does not necessarily mean a “worm’s-eye” view of the setting or action. Neither does it imply that the camera be positioned below the cameraman’s eye-level. (...) Both natural and man-made structures may be given increased height and dominance by shooting up at them. Skyscrapers, church

<sup>15</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup>Among those I have recently watched, I can name, for example, Nicholas McCarthy’s horror film *The pact* (USA, 2012), in which the viewer walks through the rooms in the apartment, especially a long corridor, several times not only with the characters who are alive, like Annie (Caity Lotz), but also with ... an invisible ghost. In the novel, as in most thrillers and horror films, moving through space often exposes one to evil (e.g. in Paul W.S. Anderson’s horror movie *Resident Evil* (USA et al., 2020). This example is also arbitrary and merely illustrates the rule.

<sup>17</sup>When what the viewer sees is filmed from their point of view we talk about the “audience’s point of view” (cf. Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 24). In thrillers and horror films, the viewer is thus scared twice: they see the terrified protagonist and the surprising and dangerous world around them.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph V. Mascelli thus writes about the long shot: “Players’ entrances, exits and movements should be shown in long shot whenever their location in the setting is narratively significant. (...) Long shots establish area of action and players’ positions. (...) Long shots lend scope to a picture, because they play up the size of the setting. Even a sequence taking place within a house should open with an exterior long shot to establish the location. This is particularly important when an entire film takes place indoors, in a series of rooms. Such a picture will appear closed in and lacking in spaciousness. Exterior long shots will open up the picture at intervals and furnish “air” for a breather” (Mascelli, 24-25). Cf. Jerzy Płużewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Książka i Wiedza, 1982), 37 and 57. and: the entry “Plan filmowy” [Camera angles], in Marek Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms] (Poznań: Ars Nova, 1994), 222-23.

<sup>19</sup>“Marco Vichi”, *Wydawnictwo Albatros* (blog), date of access 2 January 2021, <https://www.wydawnictwoalbatros.com/autorzy/marco-vichi/>.

<sup>20</sup>Mascelli, 13. “Camera may act as eye of audience to (...) be taken on a camera tour of an art museum and shown the paintings. Or, the camera may dolly slowly along an automobile assembly line, giving the viewer a close look at the process.”

steeple, mountains, may all benefit from such treatment. (...) Low-angle shots of players against a sculptured church ceiling (...) would present them against unusually picturesque backgrounds (...).<sup>21</sup>

The description is vivid: it reads as if “the camera were moving.” The reader is asked to imagine the rooms in the villa. There are also stage directions regarding sounds: the vase falls to the floor with a crash; the house is still; and “the old furniture” is creaking.

Let me provide one more example where the extreme long shot and tilting are used interchangeably; we move from an extreme close-up to the long shot and the low-angle shot. The reader as if follows the camera eye and looks at the dead woman’s face or, more precisely, her nose and the decorations on the ceiling:

Then he went and sat down in a chair. Without knowing how, he found himself with a lit cigarette in his mouth. As he smoked I he studied the lady’s sharp profile, her prominent, slightly hooked nose pointing up at the cherub-frescoed ceiling. He was practically powerless to look anywhere else. He cast his gaze into every corner of the room, following the cracks in the walls or the undulations of the spider’s webs, but it always came back to that nose.<sup>22</sup>

The narration (not only in this part of the novel) illustrates a process that can be compared to the movements of a sniper:<sup>23</sup> Bordelli is searching for evidence, because just like in crime films and TV series, every detail matters. Only a good actor would show surprise at the fact that the packet of cigarettes is empty or that he finds himself smoking again. The cinematic nature of the novel makes the reader imagine that the camera could zoom in on the nose of the deceased for a few seconds. The nose is an important detail, and it will be mentioned in the third-person subjective narration more than once. As it turns out later, it will help solve the case. Indeed, the nose was the indirect cause of the woman’s death: she died after smelling yerba mate sprinkled on her cat. The camera moves from the nose of the deceased upwards and then down, towards the nose, and then back up. These would be tilt shots. Vichi also suggests that Bordelli is tired and therefore he is looking at the ceiling. When Bordelli “cast his gaze into every corner of the room” it is as if we were dealing with the tilt shift shot: the camera moves dynamically, like in crime movies and TV series, looking for evidence.

We also know that Bordelli is attentive and on the lookout, which corresponds to the movements of the camera, because a number of verbs referring to visual perception are employed. Indeed, there are quite a lot of them on just two pages. Sight plays a more important role than any other sense. And acute senses, in addition to intelligence, are what a real detective or police inspector needs. The eye of the protagonist is the equivalent of the camera eye: “glancing

<sup>21</sup> Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 40-42.

<sup>22</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 37-38.

<sup>23</sup>Piotr Śmietana, “Techniki filmowania - kilka zasad, które warto znać!” [Filming techniques: Rules you have to know], *Lepsza fotografia lepszy film* [Better shots, better movie] (blog), 31 October 2017, <https://blog.cyfrowe.pl/techniki-filmowania-kilka-zasad-ktore-warto-znac-2/>. Śmietana discusses long shots, tilt shots, over the shoulder shots, the sniper vision shot, and extreme close-up.

at his watch,” “he looked around for an ashtray,” “spotting a wastebasket in the corner,” “he walked past the bed and noticed something moving on it,” “turning around with a start, he smiled [at the sight of – D.K.],” “perplexed, he looked back,” “started inspecting the windows and doors,” “Bordelli got down on his knees for a better look,” and “He’d never seen anything like it.”<sup>24</sup> The following sentence also focuses on the sense of sight: “In Rebecca’s room, the window had been left ajar. Bordelli opened it wide, pulled up a chair, and sat in front of it. The wind gently rustled the trees’ great boughs (...).”<sup>25</sup>

Smell is a detail that is much more difficult to represent: camera angles are of no help when it comes to smell. And yet it can also be shown. Monika Braun asks:

Is there any specific kind of trauma related to the sense of smell? There are acting exercises whose aim is to develop the sense of smell (and taste). [...] Actors learn how to visualize and verbalize sensory experiences. [...] In keeping with the principle that in order to communicate anything, one must first possess it. [...] The next stage is finding the right forms of expression [...].<sup>26</sup>

In the third-person subjective narration the reader is told what Bordelli felt, and they imagine how an actor playing Bordelli would show that he can smell, for example, old carpets or bathrooms, dust or cigarettes and an ashtray full of cigarette butts. Vichi suggestively indicates the smells present in a given space and describes how they make Bordelli feel. The reader imagines how the actor would act out the perception of various scents.

## From the long shot to the extreme close-up

“A moving shot may be further defined by the type of shot at the beginning and end of the move: such as dolly from the medium shot to a close-up,”<sup>27</sup> Mascelli writes. Such shots are characteristic of the crime novel. The author describes the space as more and more confined to finally focus on the details. These details are extreme close-ups:

Detail (or an extreme close-up): shows a fragment of an object, e.g. human eyes, mouth, hands, etc.; a prop or a fragment of a decoration shown on the entire screen. Because it is so suggestive, it is primarily used to increase dramatic tension.<sup>28</sup>

Extreme close-ups reveal unique details: freckles on the face, curvature of the nose, a stain on a plate, the contents of a clipboard or drawer. Everything else fades into the background and becomes irrelevant, blurred:

<sup>24</sup>Vichi, *Death in August* 219–20.

<sup>25</sup>Vichi, 219.

<sup>26</sup>Monika Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne: ...o komunikacyjnych aspektach aktorstwa* [Everyday and non-everyday games: ... the communicative aspects of acting] (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2012), 127.

<sup>27</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 33.

<sup>28</sup>Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 224; Płazewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film], 53–56. On pages 55–56, the author also discusses the role of extreme close-ups in suggesting: a) tension; b) fear; c) pity.

Full screen close-ups of letters, telegrams, photographs, newspapers, signs, posters, buttons, rings, or other written or printed matter are called inserts. [...] Generally inserts are filmed so that they overlap the frame slightly, thus eliminating the background.<sup>29</sup>

Details play a key role in both the detective story and any crime film or TV series. However, today intellectual deduction visualized on the screen thanks to computer techniques (see, for example, the latest TV adaptation of *Sherlock Holmes*<sup>30</sup>) or laboratory tests carried out by specialists (*CSI: Miami*, *CSI: New York*, etc.) are more popular than looking for material clues and drawing conclusions. In the past, detective Monk would carefully pick up even the smallest hair from the ground,<sup>31</sup> and Hercule Poirot, played by David Suchet, would silently inspect the surroundings.<sup>32</sup>

Roland Barthes's "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative" helps one analyze the role played by details.<sup>33</sup> While Barthes questioned his theory in his post-structuralist work *S/Z* (1970), in interpreting the function of the text he drew attention to visual details. He pointed out that narratives are not only verbal (oral or written), but also visual (e.g. stained glass) and audiovisual (film) texts. Barthes analyzed James Bond movies, studying their distributional and integrative functions, in relation to how many telephones were there at a police station and whether someone would answer them. "Some narratives are predominantly functional (such as popular tales) and (...) some other are predominantly indicial (such as "psychological" novels)," Barthes observes.<sup>34</sup> Indices refer to minor concepts, which nevertheless are crucial for the story.<sup>35</sup>

In *Death in August*, dust on the candelabums, furniture and carpets in the villa are all indices. They demonstrate that the late owner was elderly, ill, and could not manage her estate. Cigarettes also play an important role in the novel. They are not clues but they tell us something important about Inspector Bordelli. They are, as Barthes would say, functions – they show that Bordelli has an addiction and that his profession requires concentration and decisiveness. Cigarettes point to both nervousness and the need to focus. They are also *signum temporis*; after all, smoking was extremely fashionable in the 1960s and Vichi's book is set in the early 1960s.<sup>36</sup> "Bordelli extinguished the cigarette against the empty pack, crumbled this up and put it in his pocket."<sup>37</sup>

This sentence shows that Bordelli is tired and distracted – one would have to be very nervous or distracted to put a cigarette butt in an empty packet into one's pocket. This scene is very

<sup>29</sup>Maselli, 32.

<sup>30</sup>Toby Haynes, Euros Lyn, and Paul McGuigan, *Sherlock*, TV crime drama (UK, 2010).

<sup>31</sup>Andy Breckman, *Monk*, comedy drama detective TV series (USA, 2002).

<sup>32</sup>Clive Exton, *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, TV crime drama (UK, 1989).

<sup>33</sup>Roland Barthes, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative", *New Literary History*, 6,2 (Winter, 1975): 237-272.

<sup>34</sup>Barthes, 247.

<sup>35</sup>Barthes, 247.

<sup>36</sup>*Death and the Olive Grove* takes place in Florence in April 1964. *Death in August* takes place in 1963.

<sup>37</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 38.

visual: it could be shown in an extreme close-up. The viewer would interpret it behaviourally and learn more about the Inspector and his *modus operandi*.

The film techniques, such as panning, tilting, sniper vision and different camera angles (wide shot, long shot, close-up, and extreme close-up), employed in the novel, as it were, do not function on their own but often in conjunction. Let us take a look at the villa, first from the outside and then from the inside:

He walked back down to the villa. Beyond the colossal cast-iron gate, at the back of a dark garden full of trees, he could make out the villa's dark silhouette. And, behind a towering hedgerow of laurel parallel to the house, the lighted rectangle of a window. [...]

He tried to push the great gate open, but it was locked. It was also very tall, with pointed spikes on top. He had better find another solution. Walking along the enclosure wall, he found a small side gate. He pushed it open, forcing the accumulated rust. The garden was in a state of abandon, but not completely, as if a gardener tended it perhaps three or four times per year. The villa, with its crumbling façade, must have been from the seventeenth century. Three storeys, five windows per storey, all closed except for the one with the light in it, on the first floor. Through the uneven panes he could see a frescoed ceiling.

Hugging the walls of the villa, he arrived at the rear. There was a large park with very tall trees and a small lane that vanished into the darkness. Beside the house, an enormous, age-old cedar thrust its bristling branches well above the roof. Bordelli threw his head back to look at it, then began to feel dizzy, losing his balance. He leaned against the wall and rubbed his eyes, to ward off fatigue. Returning to the front of the house, he rang the doorbell. He heard a gloomy trill beyond the great door, as in convents. He waited a minute, but nothing happened.

He lit a match and examined the lock. [...] The lock resisted Bordelli's efforts for a good five minutes, then finally yielded. The inspector opened the door and was relieved to feel on his face a breath of cool air typical of old villas.

He crossed the threshold and once inside, called out the signora's two surnames. No reply. The light from the half-open door filtered out from the top of the stairwell. As his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he began to look around. Some antique furniture, a Baroque mirror, many paintings. A monumental staircase in grey *pieta serena* ascended to the upper floors. A worn carpet of red fabric ran up the center of the stairs.

'Signora Pedretti, don't be afraid. My name is Inspector Bordelli and I'm with the police,' he called, slowly ascending the stairs toward the light.

He stopped in front of the half-opened door and knocked. No reply. He pushed it and felt a slight shudder pass over his face, as if he walked into a spider's web: an elderly woman lay face up across a bed, her nightgown raised up to her belly.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Vichi, 35–37.

This vivid description of how Bordelli tries to enter the villa, finding it difficult to open the old gates and the door, adds to the overall mystery and horror.<sup>39</sup> It also suggests that all the barriers around and inside of the old villa (on the ground floor and on the first floor) break down when force is used. The villa and the park, with paths vanishing into the darkness, are a giant labyrinth. Vichi employs this metaphor in this description as well. The descriptions of the path that leads through the garden and then the villa, first from the outside and then from the inside, “read” like a classic film sequence: “a series of scenes or shots that constitute a single whole. It can take place in one or more places, starting in the open and ending inside a building, for example.”<sup>40</sup> The descriptions of successive floors and rows of windows “read” like tilting, panning or the sniper vision shot. The successive tilt shots show the huge cedar tree, and then, already inside the villa, the stairs. Bordelli looks them up and down. The reader who is watching the detective at work has the impression that they are watching a movie which employs different camera angles. Cinematic voyeurism, looking and observing, plays an important role. Bordelli, and thus the reader, is trying to see what is happening in the room seen from the outside. A similar sequence may also be found in Marco Vichi’s *Death and the Olive Grove*.<sup>41</sup>

The reader, as it were, also feels and hears the same things as Bordello – they feel the coldness of the old thick walls; they feel the sticky cobweb on their face; and they hear the silence, or silence and echoes. The sentences are straightforward and descriptive, like in a script. They refer to individual actions and sensory feelings (sight, hearing, smell, touch, feeling). Vichi also describes how dark it is in the villa and how the light travels through the empty house. However, the emphasis is on Bordelli’s visual impressions. He is observant; his eye moves on from one thing to another. The eyes adjust to the dark and see more and more details and the camera can show this process through extreme close-ups, play with light, and intershots. The descriptions of the respective floors and rooms, as well as the surroundings of the house, correspond to the sniper shot vision, the tilt shot, and the pan shot. At the end, we as if see the dead woman’s body<sup>42</sup> in full frame (full shot) and in a slight close-up. The frame is horizontal. The image is unsettling because the body is arranged in an unnatural way: across the bed, with the nightgown indecently exposing the lower part of her body. Vichi is indeed great at moving from the full shot to the close-up (and even the extreme close-up). Once again, once this scene ends, the reader will be reminded of the nose and the mouth. We already know that the sense of smell, to draw on Barthes, is the

<sup>39</sup>Vichi most often starts with a wide shot, and then moves on to close-ups and extreme close-ups. He employs a similar *modus operandi* in *Death and the Olive Grove*: first he shows the area, then he describes the villa and the garden around it, the interior of the villa, and finally the maid and a Nazi who hired her. The owner of the villa is hiding somewhere abroad. Vichi also employs the third-person subjective narration in *Death and the Olive Grove*. Cf. Marco Vichi, *Death and The Olive Grove* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 18-19.

<sup>40</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 23.

<sup>41</sup>Vichi, *Death and the Olive Grove*, 79-80.

<sup>42</sup>Full shot – According to Marek Hendrykowski, it is a medium shot: “actors can be seen from head to toe against some background; this shot was often used in silent films.” Entry: “Plan filmowy” [Camera angle], in: Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 223. “In full shot, the actor fills the frame. The character can be identified. Their actions are clearly seen. So is the background – the viewer can inspect it. The viewer also learns more about the character by seeing how they behave in their environment. It is rarely used, usually as an intershot between the wide shot and close-ups. Sometimes it is used as a substitute for the wide shot, if the setting makes it impossible to use the wide shot.” Płużewski, *Język filmu* [Language of film], 44-45.

core (cardinal function) – the key to solving the case. Let us look at a detailed description (a close-up) – the camera eye as if focuses on the details:

As if obsessed, the inspector turned round again to look at signora's nose. From the dead woman's motionless, half-opened lips a white foam that looked like snail-slime was trickling out. The little bubbles burst and then followed by more bubbles. There was still some movement in that lifeless body. Then the spittle ceased, and the foam dissolved into two tiny droplets that rolled down her cheeks, drying before they reached the bedsheet.<sup>43</sup>

The kinetization of the description of the deceased – the description that is detailed, almost naturalistic, and of a “living dead” – triggers references not only with the crime story (various scenes, often with an ironic undertone) but also with the horror movie. The detailed description of the saliva oozing from mouth of the dead woman triggers strong emotions in the reader and would also have the same effect on the viewer: “Utilize close-ups to emphasize a particular action or to isolate a player or action by removing all else from view. Use extreme close-ups for full-screen shots of very small objects or actions.”<sup>44</sup> The choker close-up, a variant of the extreme close-up, shows the face “from just below the lips to just above the eyes.”<sup>45</sup>

### Close-ups: Extreme close-ups and the rack focus shot

When we focus on details, we tend to disregard other objects in the background. It is the same in fictional worlds, and in how they are perceived by readers and viewers. Apart from less important objects (Barthes's catalysts) there are also so-called “places of indeterminacy”, as defined by Roman Ingarden. Such places want to be specified.<sup>46</sup> Not only literature but also film demands this, although film offers ready-made images, though not always. The viewer must often “add to” what they see. This applies as much to the wide shot as to the close-up, on which I will comment in this section. The technique that filmmakers use (focusing on important details) is also used by writers, especially the authors of crime fiction. In *Death in August*, such an important detail is the fact that Bordelli smokes:

The inspector lit his last butt, squeezing it tightly between his fingers, to stop up a tear in the paper. He blew the smoke far away, as if to put a distance between himself and its poison.<sup>47</sup>

The words “far away” correspond to the blurred, out-of-focus, background (this is additionally emphasized by the expression which directly refers to blurred objects: “he blew the smoke”). The tear in the paper should be invisible, but the camera eye zooms in on it and the reader

<sup>43</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 38.

<sup>44</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 53.

<sup>45</sup>Mascelli, 32.

<sup>46</sup>Roman Ingarden, *The Ontology of the Work of Art*, transl. by Raymond Meyer with John T. Goldthwait, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989).

<sup>47</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 43.



sees it in a *rack focus shot*. Close-ups are also important in flashbacks. In one flashback,<sup>48</sup> the reader learns more and more details, including the most important clue. Trying to remember something may be compared to “looking through a fog,” and thus refocusing or focusing on the most important detail is both literal and symbolic:

His thoughts drifted off, searching his memory for things he had read in his youth, but he still couldn't remember ... and slowly they turned to other flies, in April of '45, in northern Italy, the flies swarming round the face of the last Nazi he killed. He had taken aim from afar, and from above, as the German ran by below the embankment. He had set the machine gun for single fire and kept shooting until the target fell to the ground. The Nazi was a blond lad of about seventeen, eyes open wide to the heavens above. His helmet had rolled ahead of him, and Bordelli had picked it up and felt something like a blow to the stomach. On one side was a swastika painted in white, with a large X painted over it in red. Above, at the top of the helmet, was the bullet hole, which passed right through the first N in the name ANNA, written in white paint beside a heart, also white, its point slanted to the left. Bordelli felt the vomit rise into his throat. He had killed a blond boy in love with an Italian girl, not a Nazi. He sat down on the grass and lit one of his hundred daily cigarettes. He had kept that helmet ever since, stowed away in a wardrobe. He never killed anyone else after that, never felt like firing anymore. The notches on the butt of his machine gun stopped at thirty-seven.<sup>49</sup>

To draw on Roland Barthes, the helmet in this retrospection, which constitutes a separate story, would fulfill the cardinal function – it would be the nucleus of the whole story. If it was film, we could easily imagine how the camera moves closer and closer to the helmet – it would be shown in the *rack focus shot* – the helmet would be in focus and the background would play the function of expansion (catalyses, indices, additional information).<sup>50</sup> Less important objects are as if blurred or “seen through a fog.”

The same happens in films where the viewer draws conclusions about the inner world from the external actions of a character (which are not explained in the voice-over). Such information is behavioral in nature. The sentence “He sat down on the grass ...” emphasizes how shocked Bordelli was when he killed a young compatriot whom he mistook for an enemy. Smoking – something Bordelli does all the time – tells us just how nervous he is. The camera eye as if moves from the so-called *long shot*<sup>51</sup> (“from afar and from above”), through the *full shot* (“a blond lad of about seventeen, eyes open wide to the heavens above”), to an *extreme close-up* (the detailed description of the helmet, which misled Bordelli).

<sup>48</sup>A dictionary of equivalent film and literary terms should be compiled. For example: *flashback* – retrospection; *flashforward* – anticipation; full shot – description of characters, etc. The relations between them, both similarities and differences, should be carefully examined.

<sup>49</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 209–10. In the next novel in the series, Vichi mentions 24 notches. See: *Death and the Olive Grove*, 74.

<sup>50</sup>Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”, 260.

<sup>51</sup>A long shot depicts an area from a distance. It is “a vast view of a landscape or scenery with no people or people shown only in the background; this shot provides information about the place where the action of the film takes place”. Entry: “Plan filmowy” [Camera angle], [in:] Hendrykowski, *Słownik terminów filmowych* [Dictionary of film terms], 223.; cf. Płażewski, *Język filmu* [The language of film], 42–44.

The description of the interrogation of the Morozzis and their wives is also (sarcastically) shown in a rack focus shot. The two couples are having lunch:

Gina and Angela tried to eat without smearing their lipstick. They raised their lips before sinking their teeth into the bread, incisors exposed all the way to the gums; then they closed their mouths and ruminated with lips sealed. They seemed downright batty. Still, their serenity had the look of innocence.<sup>52</sup>

Facial expressions and gestures, body language, play an important role in the narrative. Monika Braun observes that in “everyday communication, hands are as important as words; indeed, the hands are as interesting and expressive as the face.”<sup>53</sup>

We must remember, however, that the large lips, with lipstick on them, “raised before sinking [the] teeth into the bread” are hyperboles: Bordelli is suspicious and subjectively perceives the two beautiful married women as “idiots.” The “incisors” which bite into the bread remind the reader of horror movies, filled with werewolves, ghosts and monsters. In a film, we would see monstrous lips, with lipstick on them, and teeth biting into hamburgers. The reader is further disgusted with both women when they learn that their teeth were “exposed all the way to the gums.” This description reads like a slow-motion shot.<sup>54</sup> The focus of the camera is not on the entire face, but only on the lips which are shown in an extreme close-up. The lips replace the face. And the face is the most important in visual arts, because, as Monika Braun rightly observes, “it is the face that draws our attention. We often archive memories as a gallery of faces.”<sup>55</sup> In a sense, Bordelli is right to distrust the two women, which is why this detail is conveyed by the means of the third-person subjective narration. It is a hint about the future – the crime will be solved.

## Manipulating time: Speeding up and slowing down time

I have already mentioned that slow motion may be employed in literature, but the process itself may only be visualized thanks to film techniques. A chase, a breakaway, a fight – especially in flashbacks – are often depicted in slow motion.

As Joseph V. Mascelli states:

Rather than depict a laboratory experiment as a past event (...), it may be more dramatically shown as occurring now, before the spectator's eyes. Thus, the event is re-lived as if happening in the present, rather than in the past.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 269-70.

<sup>53</sup>Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne* [Everyday and non-everyday games], 132.

<sup>54</sup>“[...] each shot is a take.” *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 13.

<sup>55</sup>Braun, *Gry codzienne i pozacodzienne* [Everyday and non-everyday games], 137.

<sup>56</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 69.

Vichi does not simply say that Bordelli had a problem with getting into Signora Pedretti's house. Instead, he slows time down by showing how Bordelli tries to open gates and doors, etc. Then, he notes that Bordelli waited at the door for a minute: "He heard a gloomy trill beyond the great door, as in convents. He waited a minute, but nothing happened."<sup>57</sup> We can see that the "scene" is shorter than the event itself, and such a chronological shortcut is often employed in both movies and novels. The principles of the ancient theory of tragedy, especially as regards the unity of time, do not apply. Indeed, in a movie, this scene would also be shorter than a minute. According to Mascelli:

(...) the narrative must build in interest as it progresses. Each shot should make a point. (...) Eliminate all non-essentials, for the moment; and isolate whatever significant incident should receive narrative emphasis. (...) Suspenseful composition – in which significant action is hidden, absent, or prolonged (...) – can be a valuable storytelling aid.<sup>58</sup>

The first of these rules also applies to crime and detective novels. "Economical" storytelling is the best. In films, the passage of time is very often shown in a fast-forward mode. Sunrises and sunsets, changing weather conditions, traffic in the streets, vegetation, etc. are recorded in this way. *Death in August* employs similar cinematic "tricks of the trade." A long and monotonous course of events at a police station is summarized in a couple of sentences. Time "fast-forwards" thanks to "moving images":

The individual interrogations began. While awaiting their turn, the other three bided their time in three separate rooms. Once the first round was over, they started all over again. Bordelli's ashtray was filling up faster than you could count the butts. Piras only sighed, resigned to breathing the foul air. He hit the keys hard, striking them with only two fingers: Q and A, Q and A ... Same questions, same answers. One in particular.

'But we were at the coast at that time! Everybody saw us, didn't they?'

And at once the bothersome clacking of the typewriter would fill their ears. Santelia the lawyer sat as still as if he were posing for a sculpture, staring at the person being questioned.<sup>59</sup>

This fragment reads like a movie. The reader notices the passage of time, as if in a "fast-forward" mode: the ashtray is being filled, paperwork is being filled in, and the typewriter is constantly in use. Such narrative tricks are typical of both literature and film. But the reader can imagine the scene, slow it down or fast-forward a given sequence, because they are familiar with cinematic techniques. In the twenty-first century, film editing techniques have influenced the imagination of both the writer and the reader, also in regard to the category of time.

<sup>57</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 35–36.

<sup>58</sup>Mascelli, *The Five Cs of Cinematography*, 169, 173, 238.

<sup>59</sup>Vichi, *Death in August*, 269.

## Conclusion

In Marco Vichi's novels, and especially in *Death in August*, a third-person subjective narration is employed: this allows the reader to see the world from the protagonist's point of view. This corresponds to the camera eye recording all the details noticed by Bordelli. The inspector has to look for evidence and solve the case. His eyes scan the surroundings, moving from one object or place to another. He notices everything. A similar "visual narration" is employed in film and in the twentieth-century and twenty-first-century crime novels.

Vichi describes how Bordelli scans the surroundings horizontally (equivalent to the panoramic panning shot or the sniper shot vision) and vertically (the tilt shot). Bordelli's eyes move around nervously, as if he were unconsciously looking for details, and yet carefully – he notices details that often turn out to be crucial. It can be said that presenting space in such a way in the narrative corresponds to close-ups and extreme close-ups. They anticipate what is to come: focusing attention on them is not without significance for the development of the story; they allow Bordelli to solve the case. The third-person subjective narration corresponds to the camera angles often used in horror movies, especially the subjective camera.<sup>60</sup> the audience adopts the point of view of a given character; the audience as if looks through the eyes of a character. Vichi is familiar with these techniques and structures his narrative accordingly, also in subsequent Inspector Bordelli mysteries.

Nevertheless, the techniques found in *Death in August*, as an exemplary crime novel, do not exhaust the spectrum of possibilities that the writer inspired by the secrets of filmmaking can adopt. In Jakub Żulczyk's novels, for example, we find numerous references to fictional characters, making a movie based on one's life, settings that are straight from horror movies, stop motion, and "rewinding the movie," etc. Żulczyk also writes about watching a movie with oneself in it (e.g. in *Instytut* [Institute]) or crossing the border between fiction and fiction within fiction and "entering" a different movie or television show (in *Zmorojewo* and *Świątynia* [Temple]).<sup>61</sup> Vichi only makes two such allusions in his novel (and I do not discuss them in my article). Respectively, the structure of the novel cannot be compared to film editing. Fragmentation is not employed; the camera eye does not constantly move around from one scene to another and from one sequence to the next; the narrative is not "edited." On the other hand, this corresponds to Yuri Lotman's principle from *Semiotics of Cinema* (1976). Drawing on Sergei Eisenstein, Lotman argued that in the case of cinema, the juxtaposition of different points of view is best expressed through montage, and the single point of view is best expressed through *photogénie*.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, in *Death in August*, there are no allusions to film that may be found, for example, in Camilla Läckberg's *The Scent of Almonds and Other Stories*, where two people who try to commit suicide copy the solutions found in film adaptations of

<sup>60</sup>Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, *Rec*, horror movie (Spain, 2007); Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza, *Rec 2* (Spain, 2009), 2; Paco Plaza, *Rec 3: Génesis*, horror movie (Spain, 2012); Jaume Balagueró, *Rec 4: Apocalipsis*, horror movie (Spain, 2014).

<sup>61</sup>I discuss this question in: Dorota Kulczycka, *Film w prozie Jakuba Żulczyka* [Film in Jakub Żulczyk's Prose] (Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2020).

<sup>62</sup>See: Yuri Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. by M. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 97. Cf. S. Eisenstein, *Film Form*, trans. by J. Leyda (New York: Hartcourt, 1949).

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, this type of imitation may also be found in crime dramas and television series, e.g. in *Castle* or *CSI Miami*, insofar as fictional criminals find inspiration in other movies and computer games.

Depending on whether we take into account the "physical" factors of film production or the operations taking place at the level of the represented world, we can see that film may inspire numerous new "stories." In my analysis of Vichi's novel, I have demonstrated that while the writer did not use all possible film techniques, their influence is significant.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

<sup>63</sup>Not the books but the movie. See: Camilla Läckberg, *The Scent of Almonds and Other Stories* (London: HarperCollins, 2015).

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# KEYWORDS

camera eye

*influence*

crime/detective novel

## ABSTRACT:

This article examines how camera angles are used to describe space or people in Marco Vichi's crime novel *Death in August*. The focus is on the crime novel because this genre best exemplifies how cinematic techniques may be employed in literature. Specifically, the article examines the analogies between narrative strategies (especially the third-person subjective narration) and the movement of the camera eye. It is demonstrated that some narrative devices characteristic of the crime novel (or the detective novel), especially the ones connected with transitioning from the long shot to the close-up etc., have been influenced by film.



## INTERSEMIOTIC GAMES

THE THIRD  
PERSON  
SUBJECTIVE  
NARRATION

camera angles (long  
shot, close-up,  
extreme close-up)

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# Victoria Kawēkiu Ka‘iulani Lunaliilo Kalaninuiāhiāpalapa Cleghorn: Creative writing and adaptation

Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki

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There were two cinemas in the town where I was born. One was called the “Ludowe” [The People’s Cinema] and it was grand. At least, it was grand to small-town people. Far away from big cities, units of length, size, and volume correspond to local circumstances. When the locals tell you that the church is far away, they envision a long journey, but for a city dweller, it is really just a short walk. The “Ludowe” cinema was grand because it could hold as many as one hundred people. Well, the “enlargement syndrome” may only be diagnosed once you move to a big city. Already on the first day, the old units of measurement shorten and decrease dramatically. Thus, the “Ludowe” cinema was grand for us, small-town folk. It had a grand front door, a grand marquee above the door, and a grand box office. Grand movies were shown on the grand screen. The best movies were foreign movies. Although some Polish movies were also good. I fell in love with movies even before I fell in love with literature. I was four years old, and my mother took me to the cinema for the first time in my life. It was the so-called “Sunday morning screening.” Afterwards, my mother could not make me leave the cinema. I liked it so much, my fascination was so great, that leaving the building was out of the question. The old purple velvet armchair was my stronghold. My mother made a number of unsuccessful attempts before she finally managed to make me move from my seat. Cinema had seduced a little boy with its magic. Nothing was ever the same.

I fell in love with literature the following year. And although I do not remember the titles of the animated features that I watched on the big screen, I remember the title of the book which I got for my fifth birthday. It was *Dar rzeki Fly* [The Gift of the Fly River]. I learned the name of the author later. It was Maria Krüger. It may be hard to believe, but right there and then, in my little head, I had the idea for a movie based on this book. I wrote my first screenplay when I was seven years old. Neither my school nor my family found it interesting. I quit screenwriting. And writing in general.

I do not know when the “Ludowe” closed; I must have been living somewhere else at the time. I remember when the other cinema, the “Słowianin” [The Slav], was closed. It was smaller and located in a backyard, somewhere in a different part of town. Germans and Evangelicals used to live in that part of town. This fact is quite important in my story. To enter the cinema, you had to pass through a narrow street lined with tenement houses. In front of the cinema, there was a stone crucifix which the Germans had left behind. Local small-minded and very religious ladies would say that the cinema was closed thanks to Jesus. Apparently, in this way he saved the town (or at least some part of it) from the indecency of film. Progressive Catholics, including cinema fans, laughed at them, saying that no German Evangelical Jesus would ever worry about the morality of Polish invaders. It was not Jesus who closed the cinema. The town authorities came to the conclusion that one cinema was more than enough. There were three cinemas in Dzierżonów Śląski, only five kilometers away by bus. Well, they were still five kilometers away...

How does a small town in Western Poland become the end of the world? According to some, when they take away the town's city rights. According to others, when the railroad closes. Some say that it happens when they close down the cinema. My town was closed twice – when the railroad was shut down and then when the cinema was closed. Last year, the railway connection was restored after almost 45 years. The cinema is still closed. I imagine that the building where the “Słowianin” used to be could now appear in the movie *Cinema Paradiso*. And this movie is and has been a kind of obsession that I nurture, encourage, and do not want to free myself from. I take the movie with me wherever I go, like a holy icon, and cherish it. It took it to Poland, Iceland, and Austria. I will probably take it somewhere else when I leave Vienna. I know that many people identify with Salvatore's story. But this is the magic of cinema. Perhaps literature stimulates the imagination more. Perhaps it makes us grow in a way that cinema simply cannot envision. Perhaps this is all true. Perhaps it is also true that cinema without text, words, and literature does not do well. A great script is half the battle. But I, too, was very much in love as a teenager. I, too, waited in the rain for the light to go out in my beloved's bedroom. And, like Salvatore, I was the son of a single mother. We were relatively poor. Like Salvatore, I lived in a small town and went to the movies whenever I had the chance. Like Toto, my mother slapped me when I spent the money she had given me to buy groceries on cinema tickets. I kept photos of famous actresses, newspaper cut-outs, in a metal cookie box. I hoped that no one would ever discover my secret. And although I managed to avoid military service, while Salvatore did not, for many years, like him, I was unable to shake off the burden of my first unrequited love. Can a heartbreak be turned into art? Into literature? Into a movie? One has to tread lightly – the whole affair may come across as trivial. I think that the Italian director succeeded, although some accused him of being too sentimental. A matter of taste.

However, unrequited love is not a question of taste or the lack thereof. It is a fact. It hurts. It torments you for years. Sometimes until the day you die. It may still haunt you in the afterlife.

Our first apartment in Vienna was at Prinz-Eugen-Straße. The bedroom windows overlooked the Belvedere, where the legendary Prince Eugene of Savoy used to live, but what was even more exciting was the fact that our house was right next to the publishing house where Freud had published his works! A publishing house? Freud? This whole mess that had been tormenting me for years? Freud's publishing house did not accept my text. From the Austrian point of view, spontaneity is harmful and extravagant. A translator of Polish literature is a serious expense, and a Polish writer with no connections... The Znak Publishing House from Kraków decided to publish my parody of psychoanalysis and autobiographical literature. The writer's ego was intact. After all, Kraków was also an imperial and royal city. The collection of short stories *Rzeczy pierwsze* [First things] was published in 2009. I insisted that it should be advertised as an autobiographical novel, in which I wrote the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Truth is not a literary category, but my experiment was successful. The power of storytelling gave me great satisfaction. Sometimes the effects were surprising. At times, readers believed that all the described events really happened. Someone once said that literary scholars and psychologists discovered long ago that no one can tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in an autobiography. Because everyone is trying to present themselves as slightly better or worse, according to their liking. Apparently, it is all about getting as close as possible to the truth about just the essential things. And my obsession with unrequited love was such a thing. Everything fell into place. Vienna. Freud. Psychoanalysis. The publishing house. I finally had to move past this! In addition, and this is true, a private practice psychoanalyst lived above us. The man was completely detached from reality, and maybe that is why he had so many patients. I used the money from my advance from the Znak publishing house to pay for a couple of sessions. And then there was literature. In the short story *Hawajski różaniec* [The Hawaiian Rosary], my psychoanalyst, Dr. Gruber, tried to teach me concentration through distraction. In short, Gruber would perform dangerous stunts and thrust his upper body out of the window. He suggested that repeating a mantra would help with my OCD – my obsession with repeating in my head the name of the person who broke my heart. Whenever the name would appear in my head, I was to pick up a rosary and, instead of the “Hail Mary,” I should recite the name of the last heir to the throne of the Kingdom of Hawaii (Yes, there was such a kingdom. Yes, there was such a prince): Victoria Kawēkiu Ka‘iulani Lunalilo Kalaninui-ahilapalapa Cleghorn! In the last session, I recited the exotic name without any problems. My old love faded into oblivion, but Dr. Gruber told me that it was not unrequited love that was my main problem. My biggest problem was my relationship with my mother. I never had closure. The doctor promised complete recovery. However, I did not learn the details, because he fell out of the window during one of his stunts. He died on the spot. The protagonist had a new obsession. Anyway, this is how my collection of short stories ends, but this is not how the story ends. I decided to turn words into moving pictures. It took me nine years. You could say that this was a long time. Or perhaps not long at all. I say that everything has its time. We must have dreams because they are free, and they sometimes do come true. What is great about books, and not so great about movies, however, is that you do not need a team of people to write a collection of short stories. The cost of the project, apart from the intangible cost, is very low. And you can shoot almost the same story without skipping anything, as you do in

re-releases. You can even turn it into a deluxe edition that is revised, expanded, and includes alternative endings. The magic of moving pictures works. Music. Live dialogues. In India, some movies even explore the sense of smell. Every country is different...

The old building of the Radio and Television Faculty at the University of Silesia in Katowice looked more like an old barracks complex than the seat of a school of cinematic arts. The time of the old barracks was coming to an end. The Faculty was moving downtown to a new state-of-the art building. I figured that it was the right time to try my hand at making movies. The moment had come to make my dreams come true. I had already made two short films. One had been purchased by a television network and broadcasted several times. This – as the critics called it – “experimental creative documentary” was devoted to Zenon, the legendary leader of the punk group *Jebana Ściera*. I felt that I was experienced enough to make a short feature. And it should be based on a short story. And this short story should be important to me. I wanted to re-tell the story of the Hawaiian rosary, and still keep the important details. I wrote the script and directed a 20-minute short movie about a janitor who works at the old Radio and Television Faculty building. The action takes place a few months before the re-location. The main character is not just a janitor. In his spare time, he makes music, writes lyrics for his songs, learns French, and dreams. However, he is still haunted by his past. He has been suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorder for years. The name of his ex-wife still haunts him. Artur is in his late forties. He regularly visits a beautiful prostitute. And even when he is with her, he cannot forget about his obsession. He cannot help but shout out his ex-wife’s name. The prostitute cannot take it anymore. From that moment on, the movie and the short story are identical: the crazy psychiatrist, crazy stunts, the rosary, reciting the name of the Hawaiian princess, the relationship with the mother, the doctor falling out the window. This is not the end. Artur realizes he is in love with the prostitute. And she is in love with him too. In the final scene, we learn that, for the first time, the man has not shouted out his ex-wife’s name during sex. He is cured and almost happy. Artur asks the woman to move to Corsica with him. For good. She does not answer. However, the audience knows that they both want to move. The movie *Hawajski różaniec* [The Hawaiian Rosary] was selected for screening and was shown at several Polish and international film festivals. I watched it on the big screen in grand cinemas in big cities. After the screenings, I kept thinking about my hometown and the “Ludowe” cinema. It was grand. For a small town. I think it will always be grand in my heart. Pure magic. For an audience of one hundred people.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

# KEYWORDS

## *Cinema Paradiso* **Adaptation**

**ABSTRACT:**

The author discusses the circumstances and the mechanisms of how personal experiences and fascination with literature and film intertwine and, after many years, lead to the publication of a collection of short stories. The collection of short stories is then an inspiration for a script, which is then made into a short movie by the writer-turned-filmmaker. The author also explains how creative writing can give rise to creative adaptation.

*Hawajski różaniec*

## CREATIVE WRITING

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Hubert Klimko-Dobrzaniecki (b. 1967) – graduate of the Krzysztof Kieślowski Film School at the University of Silesia in Katowice. In the distant past, he also studied philosophy at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the University of Wrocław, as well as Icelandic philology at the University of Iceland in Reykjavik. He is the author of novels, short stories, collections of short stories, children’s books, and short films. He wrote, among others, *Dom Róży/ Krysuvík* [Rosa’s House/Krysuvik], *Kołysankę dla wisielca* [Lullaby for a hangman], *Samotność* [Loneliness], *Zostawić Islandię* [Leaving Iceland], *Dżender domowy i inne historie* [Family gender and other stories], and *Złodzieje bzu* [Lilac thieves]. He has been nominated for the Nike Award, the Polityka Passport Award, the Cogito Award, the Angelus Award, the Silesian Literary Laurate Award, as well as for the European Literary Award and the Raymond Award. Finalist of the Polityka Passport award. His books have been translated into 12 languages. He has received two scholarships from the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for his work in the field of literature. He has also been awarded scholarships by the ministries of culture of the Republics of France and Greece. He is a regular columnist for the *Odra* monthly. From 1997 to 2007 he lived in Iceland. He is also a citizen of Iceland. He translates dramas and poetry from Icelandic. Since 2007, he has been living in Vienna and the village of Krasne.

# History and the Past: The Poetics of the Historical Novel

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A novel about the past brought to life by the imagination is like a magic carpet. It can take every traveler, both the writer and the reader, to any place and time.

\* \* \*

It lies within you. You feel it, think about it, and plan it for months. For centuries, great writers, like weavers at their looms, have created it like an intricate tapestry. Nothing is given, nothing is simple. Such a novel takes years to write. The greatest writers have it in them and write it sentence by sentence, chapter by chapter, one after another – over and over again. Constantly crossing boundaries. A never-ending process.

Did it really happen? No one can tell for sure. It happened. But did it really? Who can tell? Maybe it did and maybe it didn't. Maybe it never took place? We don't know. Did it take place or not? The historical novel has its own rules. It thrives on confabulation. It examines historical accounts, events, and fates not for their own sake, but in order to turn them into a story. Let bygones be bygones? Not at all – use them.



Events that are not accounted for. When we attempt to describe them, we are never certain if we succeed. We know, however, that we should return to forgotten events, matters, and characters and tell their story: rediscovering various people and facts, both known and unknown, is worthwhile. Brought to light for the first time or shown from a different perspective than before, they bring us closer to the unretouched truth about the past.

The contradance of history and the past is a highly complex choreographed dance. When we turn to the past and confront it with our own here and now, we do not really want to get to know the whole, sometimes heavy and troublesome, baggage of truth that the past carries with it.

One must not forget the therapeutic role of history, which – as numerous instances prove – helps heal the traumas of horrific and (in)humane historical experiences. History has exorcised them and brought people peace. Human memory works in such a way that it smooths things out. Between 1870 and 1920, in the turbulent and dramatic history of Wielkopolska, not everything happened as they say. This is true for at least three reasons.

First, this history happened sequentially, over time, slowly, steadily, at its own pace. Secondly, it happened inconspicuously, behind the scenes of the local history of fighting for survival under the Prussian partition. Thirdly, it happened quietly: so much so that many were inclined to believe that for half a century nothing had happened under Prussian rule, except for school strikes and the Drzymała scandal.

This is not true. Not true at all. Historical drama takes place everywhere. It is not only the crowds in the streets that determine the course of history. It is not only the sound of cannons or the tolling of the Sigismund bell that mark historical events.

\* \* \*

There is one more important thing: instruments must be tuned. The history of Poland usually resounds in two opposing registers: major and minor. One is saturated with our military triumphs, advantages, and victories, such as Cedynia, Grunwald, Vienna, the Battle of Warsaw, Monte Casino, and Bautzen, Psków, Chocim, Gwoździec, Obertyn, Byczyna, Kirchholm, Biała Cerkiew, Kłuszyn, Beresteczko, Kalnik, Parkany, and Zieleńce. The trumpeted battle calls and hussars' wings sometimes resonate louder, and sometimes softer, but this is not the most important thing.

The other register is gloomy, an *ostinato*: invasions, floods, *liberum veto*, rebellions, loss of independence, partitions, insurrections, lost battles, failed revolutions, unsuccessful uprisings, and the sad, solomn months spanning from January to December. Indeed, we are the champions of martyrdom ("well, they got us good, yes, they destroyed us, and they knocked out my tooth").

Is there room in the collective consciousness for a different tone and a different picture? One that differs from our popular ideas and convictions about what we owe to our ancestors and what makes the next generations of the people of Wielkopolska who we are?

\* \* \*

Behind the horizon of memory, the bygone world of those who have passed away and are long gone wrestles with tomorrow. Marcinkowski, Szczaniecka, Chłapowski, Wawrzyniak and thousands of other people. They were ordinary. They lived like everyone else in Wielkopolska. They took part in ordinary events in which everyone, one way or another, in their own way, participated. They passed away a long time ago. They will not tell us about themselves. We must, if possible, do it for them: make the dead talk to us.

Ordinary, uneventful Wielkopolska. Gray. The pale-gray, gray-brown canvas of ordinary everyday life, which for generations has been pulsating with its own rhythm in this part of the world. Nothing fancy: yesterday, the day before yesterday, then. Stęszew, Ostrzeszów, Poznań, Szamotuły, Bnin, Gniezno, Ujście, Czarnków, Biskupice, Wolsztyn, Podstolice, Pyzdry, Borucin, Manieczki, Skalmierzyce, Wylatowo, Wymyślin, Kwilcz and the like.

The eternal ordinariness of existence. Could that be the key to the exciting and extraordinary saga before you? Neither ordinary nor universal, it probably is not the key. However, it is certainly a well-oiled lock in the door (including a solid frame) which opens to the past.

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The past is not history. The two have never been, are not, and will never be the same. The past is not history. The past is so much more than any story about it. The past is not an excerpt but the whole endless past: an endless continuum of what was and has been and of what happened long ago and has taken place only recently. With and without people.

History, spoken, written, molded, carved in stone, embroidered, painted, staged, filmed, any (hi)story, whatever it may be, is therefore a specific version of an arbitrarily selected and presented section of the past. It concerns it, it draws on it, it endows it with meaning, it tries to describe it, and present it in its own way, but – let us repeat yet again – it is never the past *per se*.

The significance of the past as something-that-has-already-happened means that history may never claim to be able to replace it or trade places with it in the collective consciousness.

History and memory. Only a child immersed in the stream of their own experiences believes that the entire world consists of the here and now. Holding a smartphone in our hands, we tend to believe this too. In any case, many of us do. Boastful modernity tries but cannot quite dissociate itself from the past. Whether we like it or not, the past is always with us. It is with us, but it lives on without us.

Unlike the past, history only exists when it is told, written, drawn, painted, sculpted, filmed, or shown on stage: it renders the past present, shaping the image of what happened, whether truthfully or not. The historian does not write in the same manner as the writer. The historian should only deal in facts.

The historical novel is different. It does not have to follow the strict protocols of the past. This does not mean, however, that the author has the right to disregard or distort facts. Both the historian and the novelist search for the truth, reconstruct past events and realities, and build on them in their own way, trying to create a (hi)story.

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Facts are facts because nobody can claim them as theirs. Whether we know about them or not, they are there. Each fact, referred to at a given time, is subject to verification. Something happened or it did not. It is impossible to have “your” facts. “My” facts cease to be facts. Even if we repeat them thousands of times, fabricate them for our own or someone else’s use, advertise them, create, and reproduce them endlessly. The past is the Great Absent one. The past will not defend itself; people who care for it as a whole, as truth, must defend it.

\* \* \*

There is more to the historical novel than facts. The author is allowed, or even has the right, to invent. This does not mean they are lying. The historical novel has a special, relatively loose, relationship to facts, to which it refers time and time again, albeit freely and on its own terms.

Historical fiction uses facts for its own purposes, but it is not limited to facts. Indeed, it is happy and eager to exercise its right to literary exceptions and hypotheses. It is not interested solely in facts. The morphology of the apocryphon is much more similar to the dynamic morphology of the historical novel: I would even argue that it is much closer to that which inspires it.

The historical novel cherishes the format of the apocryphon, which allows it to do almost everything: confabulate, fill in gaps, invent, presume, dodge, question, doubt, transform, re-evaluate, and reframe scenes and historical figures. It may surprise the reader with a revolutionary take, show something “from a unique perspective,” shed new light on something, challenge the collective consciousness, circulate among what is known in order to come face to face with what is still undetermined, unclear, unexplored, and unknown in the past.

The past is a challenge for the historian. (Re)imagining it requires courage. This is a most difficult and dangerous task. It comes at great risk. In its extreme form, this journey beyond the horizon of history is like dancing over the abyss of the unknowable. It is a high-wire balancing act, in which the wire is stretched between the fixed and the verifiable and the probable and the likely.

This exciting game has one goal: to investigate the past, enter it, understand it, reveal it, illuminate it, and disclose its secrets. The skills of the historian and the historical novelist are put to the ultimate test. The desired result is a work devoted to the distant and the bygone. Thanks to their endeavors and tireless efforts, it is resurrected and saved from oblivion.

\* \* \*

The author's desire for truth comes at a cost. This is fear of the untrue. A genuine historical author always seeks to avoid this. You may invent but not lie. You are strictly forbidden to lie. Also, must not forget that the words and images you so relentlessly choose and seek are neither irreplaceable nor definitive, though they sometimes appear to be.

When we lift the lid off the past, invoke the spirits of those who have passed away, and reflect on their fates and actions, we always have the living in mind. History is a story, a narration, a representation, a presentation; *ergo* someone creates it. It is a more or less personal and subjective, and therefore inherently non-objective, image, created *ad oculos et as usum posteris*.<sup>1</sup> And you, you are the one who makes it happen.

The more you try to make the image of the past closer and more vivid in the eyes of the viewer, the deeper you enter the story and become part of it. Therefore, to be objective, as one would want you to be, is in no way considered beneficial. At best, it is an ideal the author tries to attain. They will never be able to achieve it, though.

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The performative properties of history make the past accessible, molding it in so many ways. Both fair and reprehensible. Signs (representations of facts) that were used in the process may adequately represent the past or distort it, fake it, replace it.

The good historian and the good writer both know this. They both use the imagination. It is thanks to the imagination that (their) unique vision of the past is conceived and born. They both make past events and characters into a story. They show and order facts, arranging them into a (hi)story.

The topic seems to be the same – but not its development, representation, and arrangement. Wherein does the difference lie? In the approach, it seems. In the poetics. Poetics determines the way the past is represented and explained. The historian seeks the unambiguous, while the historical author is open to interpretations. The past, presented in a different light, is not the same.

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A long, long time ago there lived a Scottish ruler named Macbeth, whose tragic life was certainly worth describing. No wonder that someone finally did describe it. There is nothing wrong with the images of bloody events found in Holinshed's Chronicles of England, provided

we have never heard of William Shakespeare's play. Was Holinshed's account deprived of credibility because of such a rewriting?

<sup>1</sup> Ad oculos et ad usum posteris – (Latin) visually and for the benefit of posterity.

Not at all! Both the chronicler and the playwright are truthful. They both tried to be credible, but it is clear that they are not credible to the same degree. In his rewriting, Shakespeare kept the subject, the basic understanding of contemporary events, the main protagonists, and their character traits. Everything else, documented in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Boece's *Historia Gentis Scotorum*,<sup>2</sup> was transformed completely under the pen of the genius from Stratford. Are we to conclude that the story of Macbeth, borrowed from Holinshed, lost its credibility because of such a rewriting? As if!

\* \* \*

Such an orthodox binary logic turns out to be deceptive and useless in navigating the seas of the historical imagination. The facts and just the facts versus fabrication. Fiction (that is: not the truth) versus truth. No in-between. No fraternizing, let alone crossing the green border to the other side. No deductions or vague guesses.

Very well, someone might say, but in the end it does not matter. Everyone has their own story. After all, stories based on real accounts of the past are somewhat different from pure nonsense and pseudo-historic lies. There must be a line between the real and the imaginary. Well, there is such a line. When one writes about the past, bringing to symbolic existence one's own story, one must not misuse facts. They should be presented with integrity and discipline.

The historian must adhere to such rules but what about the writer of a historical novel? And who can tell if fiction, even though it is made-up, does not contain truth that may be confirmed (or denied) in the light of the facts and knowledge we have access to today?

\* \* \*

Non-fiction is *the* element of the historical novel. It is also intimately associated with the author of a historical novel, who weaves imaginary tales around known and unknown authentic historical figures and events. So, is it fiction or not? Well, it is fiction! Of course, it is. Epic, poetic, dramatic, theatrical, painterly, radio, film, television, comic book fiction, game fiction, etc. boldly reaching and transcending the horizons of the known and the verified. However, at the same time, it is fiction that cannot be denied or refuted by facts. Although, as the name implies, it is fictitious, and thus used to making things up, when it shows the past, it is no worse than hard facts, to which it refers.

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The pages in old documents have long ago turned yellow and been covered with the dust of oblivion – which can be dangerous because it is deceptive. Without careful examination, oblivion has

<sup>2</sup> The chronicler Raphael Holinshed rewrote the version of the events recorded by his predecessor, Hector Boece, in *Historia Gentis Scotorum* (1527) some three decades later.

fed and continues to feed collective confabulations. Amnesia often opens the door to fabrication. Although it told stories about history, it was not history (a reliable vision of the past) in the strict sense. Instead, it replaced it, gradually displacing the true course of past events.

Such a story is like a false lineage, made for the benefit of a person who wants to present themselves to the world as dignified and glorious, rather than as they truly are. Falsified stories falsify and distort reality, offering in return its surrogate, an illusory substitute. This will not satisfy the reader's curiosity. We can do better than that.

Thus, ambitious historians and true historical writers have a chance to accomplish more. Thanks to their efforts and hard work, a vision that is not embellished, but much closer to the truth, may emerge. Such a vision has been gradually forgotten in the process of creating legends which glorify the ruler, or lessons *ad usum delphini*, for all his subjects and school children, when people are turned into heroes and awarded laurel wreaths. Such an alternative image of the past, often overlooked, patiently waits to be discovered.

\* \* \*

It is a shame that historians rarely venture into the realm of historical fiction, considering such "*terra incognita*" un-scientific or un-academic. However, the exact same thing can be said about the authors of historical novels' reluctance to traverse the cobbled roads of the past, paths that have long been paved with facts.

I believe that both could benefit from exchanging the road maps of imagination they use to guide them in their travels. Neither history as an academic discipline nor creative writing, for which historical events act as a trigger, activating historical imagination, will suffer as a result.

\* \* \*

Facts. A fact is a fact, they say. Did it take place or not? Did it happen or not? And how did it come about? The eternal dilemma of both the untrue and the true. Let us consider, for example, the following question: did Piłsudski ever visit the Poznań Province? Did he ever venture into or visit Wielkopolska, since he was neither popular nor welcomed here, apparently because he did not support the uprising? Is it a historical fact or simply a story? Is it true or not? Let's find out more about it, and then...

It is not true. Piłsudski visited Wielkopolska more than once. The truth peeps through this fabrication, like mistletoe hidden in the branches of the past. It is certainly true that Piłsudski did not have many supporters in Wielkopolska; on the contrary, he had many opponents. For some time, at least. Some of them changed their opinion about Piłsudski later, when he arrived in Poznań one December evening and gave a beautiful toast about the people of Wielkopolska at Zamek.

Well, the untrue is like a parasite – it feeds on the true. It draws on it, consummates its juices, and attaches itself to its root system, which extends deep into the past. Therefore, it requires constant verification. Truly means credibly. Facts matter, especially when they inspire a revisionist approach. Only the facts – facts to be extracted for the benefit of collective memory. And the facts in this case have not been studied very diligently. They have been disregarded, overlooked, or revised in keeping with someone's specific needs.

The attitude of the people of Wielkopolska towards Józef Piłsudski is but one example of many similar situations that have persisted for generations as clichés. Revised "history" displaces the past, and when repeated and replicated over and over again, becomes a "well-known fact." There are many, many such pseudo-historical "facts" in the collective consciousness.

The one associated with Piłsudski has been taken for granted by the public and transformed into a semi-mythical axiom or statement: as everyone knows, the head of state and First Marshal of Poland never visited Wielkopolska. Everyone knows that...

The problem is that not everyone knows that, or, indeed, that everyone is wrong about it. In such a case, a popular story about the past is neither encouraging nor motivating, but only disturbing. Instead of our own past, which has something important to say about ourselves, we come face to face with an obscure, false, and artificial myth.

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We should know our past, first of all, because it is our own. We should all examine and discover our past. Scientific, artistic, and literary histories can help us greatly. Provided that we acknowledge as true (that is, actual) the existence of some events that actually took place, and not stop at the very beginning of the road, accepting a substitute mockup of an alleged reality of the past and the illusion it evokes for granted.

History as a mock-up imitates the real. Not only does it distort the truth about the past, but also propagates lies and untruths. Flavor and color are gone. It thus falsifies reality. Historians and historical writers are aware of this. But not only they...

The propagandist (not to be confused with the propagator) knows this too. For propaganda purposes, they use "fake news" and camouflage. They manipulate texts, treating them selectively and instrumentally. They prey on human ignorance and use the illusion of "facts," pulled like a rabbit out of a hat, to achieve specific goals. After all, propaganda does not use facts, but pre-processed pseudo-facts, prepared with a specific goal in mind, used as substitute for facts.

The result? The result of such a treacherous substitution, of appropriating the past, is visible to the naked eye. Instead of accounts based on facts, various factoids have found and continue to find their way into the collective consciousness: they pose as reliable accounts of the past, but they are mere fantasy. In such texts, therefore, there are facts and pseudo-truths –

in contrast to what actually happened in the past, that is, the actual course of certain events, which function as both personal and collective experiences.

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We still have (relatively easy) access to authentic traces and accounts of the past, real life, from one hundred or more years ago: in short, to everything that actually happened or took place. The protagonists, perhaps not all of them but still many, made sure that the memory of them and the important events in which they participated would not be lost. Not everyone, like Dezydery Chłapowski, had his Kalinka with them at the end of their life.

Our common past, be it represented or not, belongs to our predecessors and, more importantly, continues to exist and is constantly made visible through and thanks to witnesses, archives, accounts, memories, photographs, films, and documentaries.

Fortunately, these records, so valuable to us, have not been lost. Most of them can be found in archives, chests, and drawers. One only has to look at them carefully, making sure that they are not lost forever in a furnace, paper mill or garbage dump and thus completely forgotten like thousands of camera rolls, illuminated with images of the past, that were used to reclaim silver or to make combs and hairpins.

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Every thread counts in the fabric of history: even the tiniest detail that has survived to this day. Details that are misused, misplaced, or turned into a boring textbook or a pseudo-historical text not only fail to create myths but, when served in such an easily digestible and bland form, effectively destroy them, forcing you to start all over again.

History in all its forms turns out to be a means of testing past events: a story built around the past and, realistically speaking, what is no longer present. Let us repeat once more – following in the footsteps of great polymaths such as Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Tacitus, Pliny the Elder, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Michelet, Burckhardt, Ashkenazi, Ariès, Huizinga, Braudel, Gieysztor, Geremek, Modzelewski, Topolski, Sklar, White, Davies and others – past events are not synonymous with history.

History is created. It is represented as a sequence of images. It cannot exist otherwise. The past exists, it happened, it cannot be (ex)changed, it is. Contrary to what tyrants and totalitarian leaders have been and still are doing with it, the past cannot be changed. The past is factual. It is truthful. Indeed, it is never history.

How so? After all, the task of history is to show the past, tell it, present it, visualize it, bring it as close as possible to the contemporary reader. Is it not? So, what exactly is its function? In short, history is the process of discovering the past, be it as an individual or as a collective. We are



talking here about our own and some else's past, about ancient times and contemporary events. Indeed, the past is always considered by someone as their own, insofar as, without exception, the one who (re)presents it is always behind it.

Such a vision of history, (re)presented by either the academic or the novelist, allows us to reflect on the past, so that those who live here and now and those who will live after us may learn from it.

Historical reconstruction is an (incomplete) expression and examination of an individual discovery, of something that once, *in illo tempore*, happened. It is a subjective attempt at recreating the past after many years and centuries have passed. Such an attempt is necessarily full of gaps: despite the author's best efforts, it is imperfect, flawed, incomplete, which is what usually happens when we dare to touch the untouchable.

That is it. Indeed, apart from what we have at our disposal in terms of materials and sources, at the level of intentions, though not in its final form, it is made of and built around the known and the unknown, be it events, people, or memories.

Indeed, absence that is present... The known discovered in the distant. A detail, letter, document, or photo that, lucky for us, has survived: a single element that is a building block for the whole. It is like a pebble in a mosaic, but without "the whole" it is just a pebble. This surviving fragment is all that we have at our disposal today. This is a lot, and yet almost nothing, when we consider how much has taken place since then.

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We still must establish the connection between what really happened (and is real in our "now") and history. *Distinguendum est*. Let us begin by pointing to a fundamental ontological difference. The lava of everyday events that is constantly boiling and rising to the surface, along with their unusual circumstances – just like the frozen magma of the past – is not history in itself.

The past may only turn into history if we participate in this process. People write accounts of events, they present them, they create history. It is people who see something significant in certain events and arrange them in keeping with a certain logic. They usually (if not always) do so because it suits them, because they are not objective, because something is at stake for them.

The yesterday and the day before yesterday are equally worth discovering and knowing. Do not leave everything to historians, anticipating that they will show you the true past. They know how much truth is hidden in the imaginary past. The best historians admit that a historical myth (a founding myth, etc.) is a fascinating object of study.

We do not have to go back to the Middle Ages to find that historians are often the biggest liars. Otherwise, they would have written down only the facts. Indeed, the writers of historical novels are not that much different from them – both are master-confabulators.

Let us remember that a fact, whatever it may be, happened and existed – and in this sense it exists forever – with no writers or chroniclers present. Something simply happened; it actually (that is, really) happened. It has become. There is consistency at the heart of this “happened.” Facts are facts, people say. And they are probably right.

It took place, it happened – it happened in the past – and then went down in history, as if in the next stage of an eternal process in which our predecessors participated, and in which we still participate today. “It happened” also has one more advantage, namely it can be verified, that is, established as a fact. The historical writer who navigates the seas of the imagination benefits from this: they have a body of water which they can explore.

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Yes, it is true, facts are facts, but what does that really mean? Whenever one wants to describe or present a fact or any sequence of facts, one “adds” oneself to it. The past constantly demands remembrance and personal reworking from those who have inherited it. This is an individual and a group task: the human being must participate in it.

But how does what we conventionally call “a fact” make its way from the past to history? How does it become history?

Well, there is only one path, one transmission lane that leads to it: through story(telling). Someone has to tell it: save it from oblivion, pass it on to someone, testify that it was so, write it down, make a note with the living and posterity in mind, present what happened – report it.

Someone has to tell it. We need an intermediary or a medium. Thus, the story is embedded and anchored in a specific textual medium, with its beginning, middle, and end. This medium is a narrative. In order to be able to exist in the space between the sender and the addressee, history must be communicated as a story, as a narrative.

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History, like fiction, takes on a life of its own. By living in its own way, it becomes a fact. It is described and presented in a specific way. (Re)presented in someone’s account, it conceals itself. *Nolens volens*, we accept it as a fact and recognize it as the truth. And we no longer know whether this fact actually happened. Probably it did or perhaps it did. But did it really?

Did a fact that was recalled and described by someone, and was thus communicated to us, really take place? We have no control over this. A fact, *omnino vere*,<sup>3</sup> or some version of it – a legend, a myth, an academic lecture, a school lesson, a textbook, a popular account, to name just a few – is internalized by us, allowing us to build a picture of the past: the history of the

<sup>3</sup> *Omnino vere* – (Latin) quite true.

Proto-Slavic tribes, the first Piasts, the golden century of Jagiellonian power, the Wettin dynasty, the drama of the partitions, the longest war in modern Europe.

Told and retold in a given community, historical narratives crystallize over time. If they are not revised, they consolidate, freeze, harden and turn into stone or amber as the only version of truth about the past: the human mind no longer feels the need to refer to facts. Historical narratives are recognized as one's own and cherished by a given individual or community.

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What connects historical fiction with reality? Everything and nothing. Fiction is not pure fabrication, illusion, fantasy, or mirage. Marked on the roadmap of the eternal paths of the human imagination, whether we like it or not, it becomes an object – it has a shape, and its own dimensions, topography, and characteristics. However deceptive, detached from the world, and fantastic it might seem, it always exists right next to the real: on the periphery of the real, as a specter of the past, its second life, an alternative form of being.

Writing a novel has always been a time-consuming and tedious activity. The writer works hard, always searching and wandering, unsure of the final result. The novel, like any other creative act, imprisons its author: the writer desperately wishes to overcome their limitations, escape, and find freedom. Only the daring are able to finally sail to their designated destination and port.

If you have not experienced this feeling personally, you do not know how much it torments the heart and the mind of those who are trying to create something based on the past. Each work is created and suspended between imprisonment and liberation. It finally comes to the light of day and finds independence, leaving behind the embarrassing and rather unnecessary author who created it behind.

Is the historical writer alone in their writing? Not exactly, though it might seem so. After all, the writer writes with their own hand, holding the pen or typing on the keyboard; no one guides or controls their hand, standing behind their back.

In fact, however, something, a certain invigorating power, is always with them. It is the expectations of their readers, whose existence and presence are always recognized, even if they are dismissed. It is they who, one way or another, turn out to be a mirror in which, *nolens volens*, their original intentions are reflected and reviewed.

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A novel about the past tells its own story. It binds and intertwines *Dichtung* and *Wahrheit*. Like a brilliant smuggler, it is constantly on the run, transporting contraband across the green border of writing. Every historical novel constantly oscillates between the probable and the unlikely. Thus, by its nature, it lives on the margins. It moves, complements, and supports

the facts that the past is made of. As long as it remains probable, it is a historical novel. It is a must, a *sine qua non* condition, and a loan with a notarized guarantee that the author took out at the bank of the past.

Historical writing in all its shapes and sizes should reveal the past as evocatively as possible and help us understand it. This can be considered its proper destiny. And what should it not do? It is clear. It should never replace the past. It is not authorized to do so. Although we know that it can impose itself on people and seduce, charm, and deceive them if they succumb to its deceptive power.

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A good historical novel thrives on confabulation. This is its natural element and basic *raison d'être*. However, it cannot ever claim to replace what is real in the past. Deprived of a safety net, fabrication always endangers those readers who are captivated and deluded by it. Naive consumers of fiction are eager to believe in something that does not really exist. This naive belief in the non-existent has often brought them pain and suffering.

The point is that society as a whole – and I refer here to the collective consciousness, especially its most delicate parts, which are susceptible to infection, is not immune from contamination by historical untruth. Its immune response is often too weak. Then it becomes infected. Luckily, sometimes it is a minor infection. However, even such a minor (local) infection may turn out to be devastating and disastrous when the rapidly progressing gangrene of pseudo-historical lies follows.

Facts are initially denied. Especially painful, difficult, unacceptable, and even undeniable facts. It is impossible to completely ignore them, forget about them, deny their uncomfortable existence. The less they are processed by the collective consciousness, the more real they turn out to be: like a thorn stuck in a wanderer's foot, making them unable to go any further.

Our memory is selective. Memories of what happened come back to us in a series of close-ups: sometimes close and loud, sometimes distant, coming from afar. Each triggers a new, often difficult, revision of what we remember.

\* \* \*

Should we remember the past? Today I know that it is by all means worthwhile. In the past, when I was young, I only cared about the present. Only the new today mattered and it absorbed me completely. I treated the past with contempt – as unimportant, irrelevant, gone, passed. The future was my illusory tomorrow, that is, a (predictable) continuation of the sequence of the now.

Today I feel and perceive it quite differently. The past, present, and future should not be compared. This is a big mistake. It is enough to think about how the present, in which we are immersed like in a stream rushing into the unknown, flickers and passes in a moment. It is so

insignificant, especially when considered against the abyssal background of all that has happened in the world, good and bad, before us. It is hermetically closed with us in a capsule, the here and the now, against the background of the unknown future – the possible and the impossible, the hypothetical and the true. It is hidden behind the gates of the unknown tomorrow.

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Historians versus authors of historical novels. Both write (about) history. But is it only them? Does what connect and divide them exhaust the past and contemporary understanding of historiography? Of course not. There is someone more. We must not forget this. Each is someone who studies the past, who is knowledgeable about it, and who wants to share it with others in order to preserve it.

Neither historiography as a science nor historical fiction, with all due respect to the efforts of those who cultivate and create them, have a sole claim to history. They constitute but a part of it, a *pars pro toto* of its daily and eternal existence.

The otherwise well-deserved praise for scientific historical treatises and historical novels would not be possible without their primary frame of reference. This must not be forgotten or taken lightly.

The system in question is an inexhaustible reservoir of all kinds of ordinary, that is, well-known, texts about the past, be it in speech or in writing. These include, among others: stories, legends, myths, songs, hearsay, notes, letters, reports, correspondence, family stories, communal stories, textbooks, diaries, calendars, glosses and notes, memoirs, chronicles, private stories (microhistories), personal memories, journals, travelogues and travel reports, official and unofficial life stories, accounts of past events, testimonies, biographies and autobiographies, memories, anecdotes, comments on current events and history, memes, etc.

Although they seem, and in fact are, very different, they form a certain set of texts which share an operating paradigm. They are connected by discourse and language. I shall conventionally refer to such a discourse and language as colloquial. Let me add that, although it is extremely important and popular, it is not the only discourse and language out there.

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In general, there are three social historiographic discourses:

- colloquial discourse,
- artistic discourse,
- scientific discourse.

How does one recognize and distinguish between them? They have all developed their own distinct poetics. These poetics determine the specific paradigm of these discourses and the difference between them. Linguistic resources and tricks-of-the-trade, diverse as they may be, are repetitive:

the matrices, means of expression, words, rhetorical figures, and conventional tricks used to (re)present the past and transform it into history are used in specific texts time and again.

Apart from the historian and the author of a historical novel, someone else is important as well: an ordinary person who tells someone else what they have experienced or what others have experienced. In other words, an ordinary, be it anonymous or not, author of a microhistory. The past is (re)presented differently in a scientific treatise, a historical novel, family accounts, and other types of texts.

I place particular emphasis on colloquial discourse because it is so popular. It cannot be ignored. It is only against the background of the commonplace and the everyday that the discourses of the historian and the historical writer emerge as distinct.

We are all self-proclaimed historians and authors of historical novels. We all take part in this primal discourse. The emancipation of the scientific historical treatise and the glorification of the historical novel, as well as the glorification of both types of works and discourses, would not be possible without the popular, social, historical discourse. It is the primary frame of reference for both, although for each of them in a different way.

Surprising as it may be, both scientific and artistic discourse draw on colloquial discourse, because it is colloquial discourse that gave rise to them in the past. Even more importantly, they both continue to rely on it and are based on it. This constitutes their foundation, just as colloquial language is the basis for poetic, literary and scientific language.

All stories are based on someone's subjective experience of the past. Some call this empathy, I call it understanding the past. It is through and in these three types of discourse that human interest in what has been, since time immemorial, circulates in different communication circuits.

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Why do we need the past? What is it for? And why does a traveler need the road they have already taken, the road on which they are now, or the road that is ahead of them? Why does a tree need its roots which feed and nourish it?

I have already discussed various utilitarian practices of falsifying history that poison individual and collective perceptions of the past. I do not think they are dominant or inescapable, however. On the contrary, I have described them in order to be able to point out their polar opposite. It is a disinterested, so to speak, relationship with the past, in which the today feels the need to connect with the past.

A scientific text and a work of art, but also caring for graves, an album with family photos, researching a family tree, or telling a story so that a memory or an experience can be passed on to the next generation, as well as many other forms of connecting with the past – seen in such a perspective, they are an *acte gratuit*, a noble symbolic manifestation of preserving and connecting with the past.

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It is taken for granted that the past is irretrievably lost. Is it really? Yes, it has passed, it has fallen into the well of the past. But not quite. It still exists in us, albeit differently than when it was alive with current – or indeed past – affairs, and the daily hustle and bustle of people who have passed away.

Is history always true? Not at all... This is a deceptive belief that has been held for centuries by historians. An idol of absolute truthfulness. Mortals cannot even come near it, let alone touch it. However, it should not be questioned, challenged, condemned, or mocked. The fact that a scholar wishes to be as objective as possible in their study of the past is praiseworthy.

The fact that we will never know the whole truth about the past does not mean, first of all, that we should not try; *secundo*, that the truth about what was and actually happened does not exist and – seen by contemporaries as lost forever – will never be discovered. Yes, it existed, it exists and will continue to exist, and thus it should be explored.

There is such an intriguing ancient paradox. Its seemingly irresistible logic suggests that the past does not exist because it has passed away, and neither does the present, because it is always already the past. And there is certainly no future, because the future is yet to come and, in a moment, it will also become the past.

And what is left for us? Let us abandon the deceptive teachings of the sophists and follow our own logic, basing our knowledge of the past and ourselves on truthful personal experience. The past exists in the present in many ways. Immersed in the stream of the present, we do not have to, and in fact we would not be able to, completely break our ties with the past. The only question is: what to do with it? Maybe we should renew our contact with the past even though this may be difficult? So, let's get to the point...

In general, we do not know as much about the past as we would like. That is why it is so attractive, mysterious, and alluring. It is a land of facts and doubts. Whoever wishes to explore it, looks for the necessary support in facts. If these are missing, all we have left is the power of the imagination. Reconstructing the past, and this is what history is, is essentially a creative and imaginative act.

Anyone who explores the past processes the past through imagination. *Nolens volens*, it is our inquisitiveness, perceptiveness, curiosity, doubts, hesitations, knowledge and ignorance, our question marks, insistence, empathy, our wish to broaden our horizons, and our ability to associate and draw logical hypotheses and conclusions that makes us do it. And, last but not least, an individual and collective need, the skill and courage to come to terms with the past.

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Who needs fiction? Shouldn't we write only about real events and people? First of all, who said that fiction must be untrue? Accused of being untruthful simply because it is fiction?

Nonsense. Secondly, does fiction, by definition, exclude the presence and participation of facts? Why should it? Thirdly, who will ensure that what is called true history is indeed truth and nothing but the truth? Or maybe the story that is recognized as true is also but a confabulation? Or what is worse, it poses as truth?

Fiction does not have to lie. A myth, like a novel, moves in-between the true, based on facts, and the fabricated, derived from facts, constantly bringing together the real and the unreal. Neither myths nor novels are simply created in the blink of an eye. Such texts need time. They are preceded by a complex process of crystallization and shaping.

We can only talk about the past if human imagination is there to make it happen. The historical novel, because it is of particular interest to us in this text, is the result of a tirelessly persistent game. A game of zooming in and out, a game of moving in-between the known and the unknown.

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Fiction may be surprising at times. Let us imagine that, for the sake of our novel, we come up with a fictional town name. Let us assume that the town is called Wymyślin. However, the name of Wymyślin, invented *ad hoc*, does not stay “fictional” for long. To our surprise, we discover and realize that there is a town called Wymyślin in Poland.

What a surprise! The Wymyślin in question turns out to be not as sophisticated and imaginative as someone might think. It is a village near Lipno located in the Kujawy-Pomerania Province. It was and it is. Quite real and not made-up. Well, reality can be unexpected and official lists of town names are long. Apart from Wymyślin, we also have Wymysłowo, Wymysłów, Wymysyl, Wymysły, Wymysłowice (near Strzelno), Wymysle, Wymysłówce and Wymysłance. Really. It seems that our ancestors beat us to it.

Enough! Definitely enough. Both in the past and today, it is born and exists in its own way, governed by its own rules. It is impossible to completely distill it, drain it, purge it of reality. Even the most ridiculous and fanciful things refer to reality. They belong somewhere.

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It gets really interesting when life is turned into a story. When it disappears forever, locked in the dark labyrinth of the past: Ariadne suddenly cries for help and guides Theseus, who wants to save her beloved.

Theseus, and this is my version of the myth, did not know how dangerous and fraught with danger his journey would be. He wanted only one thing: to rescue Ariadne and bring her back to life. If we compare a storyteller, be it a scientist, a writer, or perhaps a chronicler, to the mythical Theseus, they become someone who, whenever they set out on their way, wishes to reverse the death of what once lived and to reverse the irreversible. They thus undertake a dangerous task.



Nothing else matters to them. Their only desire and goal is to save someone's life: to show them the way out of the maze thanks to a thread of facts: to save the past from dying in the darkness of eternal non-existence.

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When does man cease to exist? When will the trace of them disappear forever? Well, you exist for others: you live in them, through them, and thanks to them. Indeed. Like Dr. Peiser who returned from the war to his beloved daughter Lili, we may cease to exist in our lifetime. He loved his daughter and missed her during all those years and eventually became a complete stranger to her, wandering around his family home like a specter of his former self.

Without a story, without a novel, characters are banished and thrown beyond their imaginable boundaries defined by the trajectory of the word: they are expelled beyond the horizon of reality onto the distant margins of non-existence. But do those who lived before us, our ascendants, once present here, completely sink into this lifeless nothingness the moment they die? When we stand up for them, we fight to save ourselves. *Non omnis morietur*. Disappearing, falling beyond the horizon of existence, mortals continue to live, be it forever or for a while.

They all have one thing in common: one day or night they suddenly go away forever. Nevertheless, they do not quite pass away. Memory can bring them back to life. It is thanks to memory that, despite their disappearance, they continue to live. They are because they once lived and existed. There once was the Devil of Venice. Someone like that really lived in Wielkopolska centuries ago. And he is not the only one.

Emilia Sczaniecka, Filipina Kottek, General Chłapowski from Turwia, the Herse brothers and their friend Władysław Jerzykiewicz, count Władysław Zamoyski, the pianist Paderewski, Marshal Piłsudski and the German diplomat count Harry Kessler, who was kind to Poles – they all once lived. So did Dr Karol Marcinkowski, Dr Heliodor Świącicki, the bookseller Jan Konstanty Żupański, the sisters Zofia and Aniela Tułodzieckie, Michał Drzymała, Bogusław Łubieński, Major Andrzej Kopa, the aviator from Ławica Wiktor Pniewski, and the brilliant chef from Wielkopolska, Maria Śleżańska.

Are all of these people gone forever? Not at all. Not in the least. They are with us as long as we remember them. They live and are still with us, albeit not in the same manner: they have been transformed into a story thanks to human memory. They exist in it as real people, perhaps even more fully than when they lived, though in their own way. And then, thanks to the magical power of memory, they can become whatever they like. The overseer Wolfgang Otto Wagner and his servant Steffi; the descendant of the Poznań Bambers, Maks Handschuh; the grandfather of Zygmunt Bauman and wise accountant Cohen; the famous Nobel Prize winner Koch, Michał Drzymała, and the future film star little Lili Palmer (*de domo* Peiser), who did not recognize her father when he came back home after war.

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Once upon a time, there was... A magical land of stories. When you wander through this elusive and deceptive land, you are unable to tell the difference between a fairy tale, a cliché, a story, a legend, and a myth. How many times have we heard such an emphatic denial: utter nonsense, untruth, fabrication, legend, myth! However, a myth – a myth about someone or something – does not necessarily falsify the real, and it is by no means synonymous with lies.

Indeed, not every story about what was and what happened tends to idealize reality. On the contrary, stories often demystify, destroying distortions and simplifications and showing clearly the real (it is worth noting the unintended paradox – after all, we refer to fiction) events and people.

In any historical novel, regardless of what it is about, there is a conflict between two cognitive approaches. On the one hand, things take on a simplified and unambiguous “comic” form. On the other hand, together with the author, we try to trace the meanders of past events: we discover contradictions, complications, and the surprising ambiguity of the (re)presented.

As the latter approach suggests, the “good guys” no longer embody pure idealized heroism, and the “bad guys” are not simply villains. It is neither a western nor a Charles May novel. When we explore the past, trying to uncover it and save it from oblivion, we discover step-by-step that the lives of the people of Wielkopolska, our ancestors, turn out to be much more complex and ambiguous than we thought.

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The game of fiction thus presents the reader with conflicting positions and opposing parties. The story of Drzymała, the children of Września, the Wielkopolska Uprising, the war with the Bolsheviks. Let us return once again to the question of myth and its complex relationship with the past. Myth, regardless of what it talks about and what it presents, makes reality unreal, transporting it into another dimension. What dimension? Generalized, uncomplicated, parabolic, suspended between the real and the unreal. Let's refer to it as the metaphysical dimension.

It is believed that a myth and a factual description are mutually exclusive. In other words, a myth is not history, as defined by objective, scientific, historians. Hence the fairly widespread view that a myth that tells its own version of historical events exists completely on and of itself: in its own mythological (non-factual) framework.

However, this is not the case. Like a legend, a fairy tale or a story, a myth grows from and draws on the real. Though it appears to be autonomic, that is, freed from reality, the universal nature of myth does not completely break away from reality, but only rises above it. It transposes history and (re)tells it in its own way. It cannot be reduced to history; on the contrary, it moves away from the fleeting and the transient.

How is this possible? Well, each myth, without exception, creates and establishes its own autonomous space-time. Thus, as a specific type of text, it turns out to be pre-historic and timeless at the same time. Thanks to this, it can be constantly reborn, and multiplied in the collective imagination. The historical matter of reality, from which it originated, disintegrates, passes, and disappears, while the myth continues.

Crucial as it may be, there is more to the myth than its lifespan.

The structure of the myth, which comprises its functions, fills in the common space with a captivating image or a set of images that a given community is willing to accept and recognize as its own. Whenever in social life a myth swaps places with reality (myth becomes reality *tout court*), it replaces, overshadows, and displaces reality, becoming more important than it.

The collective memory of the past then somehow disintegrates. This provides an illusory experience of certainty and knowledge about the past. Both the mythmakers and the lovers of myths are thus deceived – they travel along a well-worn, but in fact treacherous and ultimately disastrous, path which leads straight to idealization and, thus, to falsification, distortion, and manipulation.

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The Egyptian pharaohs knew that human life was fleeting. They also knew how resistant to the effects of time monumental structures made of huge blocks of stone were. “Soldiers! Forty centuries are looking at you.” This brilliant phrase was uttered by a man who faced the past and used a stone historical fact to create his own (hi)story.

History and the past. These concepts are often confused and treated as synonyms. Taking into consideration this semantic confusion and its serious consequences, let us try and to prevent it by redefining it. The past, as I understand it, is a primary being: the primary cause and the reason for existence – not only human existence. On the other hand, history, in its various forms and references to the past, is a secondary modeling system.

When we talk about “the past,” we always refer to the testatrix. When we talk about “history,” we refer to the heiress. Even though we participate in the past, it is our beginning, we can by no means consider ourselves its creators. History is different. The individual and society are constantly creating and establishing history anew. You cannot establish the past, it is there. Unlike history, because the essence of history is to establish.

Every inheritance, as is well known, includes assets and liabilities. One may not accept or reject it. However, if it is accepted, and life does not offer us other possibilities, it means that we are responsible for both its assets, from which we will create something, and its liabilities, things that although unwanted, are inherited by us, and cannot be disposed of, like bad debt. This is how history, understood as a systemic exploration of the past, makes itself known.

\* \* \*

Unlike the past (that is, what happened once, actually was, or, let's repeat it again, actually happened), history is implicit and hypothetical. It has just been said that statements and various judgments about the past can be and are made in good or bad faith.

Apart from the author's point of view, something else plays a role in this process, namely internal or external historical policy, motivated or dictated by the interests of the authorities. Look at what happens with history and the past at historical turning points. Such new openings, including new founding myths, have a profound impact on the present.

However, we are not interested in politics, but in the question of investigating and finding the truth about the past. Why? Why is this issue important in the lives of both the individual and the community? Well, because both the individual and the community use the past to fuel the sense of who they are and who they intend to be. Thus, for generation after generation, people who are knowledgeable about their own and others' past participate in social life of a given community – this is in our best interest. To know and understand the past does not only mean that one has a good understanding of today, but also that one is able to find the right path to tomorrow.

\* \* \*

Not everyone who revises and verifies the past-turned-myth is a dreaded myth buster. History is not a fossil. The tectonics of collective memory are in constant motion. Static popular images of the past come face-to-face with the dynamics of the new and *vice versa*.

Revising and vivisectioning historical memory usually leads to agitation, and sometimes condemnation, in the name of defending an established (imposed? sanctified?) vision of the past. You should listen carefully to the arguments of both parties. A myth buster is not a vandal, nor a barbarian trying to destroy collective memory. On the contrary, they often play an important social role. Doubt brings with it new questions. Doubt is like a breath of fresh air.

\* \* \*

Do you remember this famous sentence? *Historia magistra vitae est*.<sup>4</sup> How many times have we heard in school? Should we believe it or doubt it? I am of the opinion that we should be extremely cautious and skeptical about this ancient maxim. We should take nothing for granted. History, in all its forms, teaches some people one thing and teaches others something else. If it misrepresents the past, it can cause devastating mental damage.

<sup>4</sup> *Historia magistra vitae est* – (Latin) History is life's teacher.

A history lesson must not be confused with indoctrination. Historical facts (events, historical figures, etc.) become real to us if we understand them. It is a process of learning and discovering the past, not a collection of textbook truths to be memorized and believed. Staying open-minded about the past, provided it is guided by the truth, nourishes and fosters the micro- and macro-processes of the development of collective consciousness in a given place and time.

The present, in which the individual and society both exist, determines the relationship between today and the past. But it gets more complicated. It is a loop. On the other hand, the past also influences the present, its current affairs and developmental perspectives. Whoever is not aware of this is ready to believe that the past is lost forever, and that only today exists.

I focus on such complexities not for the sake of logical paradoxes, but to underline the importance of the relationship between the individual, the community, and the past. In times of peace, this does not play such an important role. Everything changes when war and other calamities escalate. The individual and the collective react to them in different ways. One such particularly interesting extreme reaction, on which I shall comment in a moment, is the activation of cognitive irony, which has been deeply hidden in the psyche. At heart, it is often endowed with a historiosophical aspect.

Hegel's *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time, never disappears and always demands to be expressed by those who experience it. The morbid humor which developed under the Nazi occupation, to which I would like to refer here, is a socio-cultural phenomenon which, in its many manifestations and forms, is a Polish *specialité nationale*. It is truly dark. The popular Warsaw couplets reflected the unimaginable terror of the occupation in the wider context of today, tomorrow, and yesterday:

Siekiera, motyka, bimer, szklanka  
W nocy nalot, w dzień łapanka.  
Siekiera, motyka, gaz i prąd  
Kiedy oni pójda stąd?  
Już nie mamy gdzie się skryć  
Hyle nam nie dają żyć.  
Po ulicach chodzą wciąż  
Patrzą kogo jeszcze wziąć.  
Ich kultura nie zabrania  
Robić takie polowania.

Hatchet and hoe and a bottle of vodka  
Bombs by night, in the day it's lock-ups  
Hatchet and hoe and electric light  
When will the German dogs take flight?  
What to dream and what to do  
Damn Germans make our life a zoo  
There they are on the street  
Snatching people like meat  
Their *Kultur* prohibits not  
Hunting people 'round the block.

Long before the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, Tadeusz Borowski published a poem titled "Pieśń" [Song] in the volume *Gdziekolwiek ziemia* [Anywhere this land] (1942). It begins thus:

Nad nami – noc. W obliczu gwiazd  
Ogłuchłych od bitewnych krzyków,  
Jakiż zwycięzców przyszły czas  
I nas odpomni – niewolników.

Above us – night. In the face of the stars  
Deaf from the screams of battle,  
What is the future of winners  
And who will re-remember us – slaves.

The poem ends thus:

Nad nami – noc. Goreją gwiazdy,  
Dławiący, trupi nieba fiolet.  
Zostanie po nas złom żelazny  
I głuchy, drwiący śmiech pokoleń.

Above us – night. The stars are burning,  
The sky is purple, overwhelming, like a corpse.  
What is left of us is scrap iron  
And the hollow mocking laughter of generations.

No other Polish twentieth-century poem is more profound and concise and, at the same time, more bitter and ironic. It expresses the historiosophy of the Columbus generation, marked by historical tragedy, combining its own yesterday and today with someone else's indifferent tomorrow.

\* \* \*

I wish to argue that the past, the present, and the future are not three separate entities, but communicating vessels. They are available to everyone; they are efficient and work for the benefit of a given community.

Our beginnings are in the past. We derive from it; we grow out of it. It is our mother and father. We are its continuation, bustling and working hard for tomorrow's present.

The present works not only for the future. It also works for the past that will become and transform into tomorrow. This is what teaching history should be about in the first place.

Looking at the past from a distance and noticing that the gap between the past and the present grows wider and wider with time does not happen instantaneously. It is each time a complex process in which the target result is/should be an individual or collective equilibrium between the rational and the emotional. History is not only a story about what was, but also a reminder that we carry the torch – we are the descendants.

Indeed, it is a complex process. Its driving force is not the mechanical passage of time. The past may be effectively discovered and assimilated only if the individual and the community play an active role in this process. A rational taming of the past, which plays an important psychosocial role for each community, depends on a personal (subjective) relation between the now and the past.

\* \* \*

The historian, just like the historical writer, sets out on a journey to discover the world of the past. They venture into the abyss of the past, looking for traces of ancient cultures and Atlantis. They both understand and accept the risks involved. Importantly, they do not want to avoid them; on the contrary, they are attracted to and animated by danger. They are fed by the always patient she-wolf of the past. Drinking her milk in order to survive, they are like the

milk brothers Romulus and Remus, filled with the same energy, overwhelmed by a common desire, moving in-between passion and truth.

What unites them is that they both try to discover the truth about the past. The historian tries to build their story solely on facts. They are interested in facts, only facts and nothing but facts. This is their field. This is their profession. This is their duty. The author of a historical novel does not avoid facts, but, apart from them, what attracts them personally to the story is the space of the imagination that opens up in-between.

They thus navigate among the facts, known and hidden, guided by a map on which they are marked. They are not playing it safe. They are fascinated by undiscovered and unknown lands. They look for them, similarly to the writer of the biblical apocrypha, knowing that the ancient Greek word *ápókryphos* does not mean untrue but “hidden, secret.”

\* \* \*

This is a great opportunity to take a fresh look at the past as a mysterious and unknown land. It is not easy to discover, recognize and describe it. All attempts to reach it, examine it and present it, that is, to describe it, in some respects remind us of our encounters with a culture that is not our own (I have deliberately omitted the highly unfortunate expression “foreign”), that relies on a system of values and ideals that we do not understand.

The past exists without us. In this sense, it remains an impersonal being, unlike and in contrast to history, which, in all its forms, is a subjective creation. What is important is the nature of the relationship established by the individual and the community with the past, with particular emphasis on its imaginary and emotional aspect.

People respond emotionally to the past, which is brought to life in and through the medium of history. This relationship may take on different forms, be dependent on different factors, and involve different attitudes. It fluctuates and oscillates between the distant (alienation, repression, hateful attitude towards the past) and the accessible, namely the state of immersing oneself in the past, considered by an individual or a given community as real, exciting, tangible, still present in their present environment (closeness, collective and individual fascination, admiration, self-identification, believing in it).

Connecting with the past in its cultural anthropological aspect is an act of translation: we translate ancient culture, often so distant from us that it is almost exotic, into contemporary culture. There are different translations. Apart from sophisticated and congenial renditions, there are also inaccurate ones.

We should remember about this difference and bear in mind that the process of translating one culture into another is subjective and thus poses the inevitable question: How good/fair/faithful/accurate is it? This makes us reflect on the art of translation. Both historians and writers should master this art.

\* \* \*

This raises a crucial question: Does the author respect history? Does respect only imply maintaining popular ideas about the past, or on the contrary, discovering real events that really took place (they did happen!)? In a word, respect has more to do with discovering the past by a bold and uncompromising author. Indeed, the author should reject distorted and mythologized versions of the past: in the name of the truth about people, matters, deeds, and times (re)presented in the novel.

The latter, in addition to thorough knowledge, requires personal courage. It is not easy to tell the truth, to bring it to light, and to show it in a different perspective. Especially when, for various reasons, it has been ignored, concealed, hidden, or distorted for so long.

Artistic demystification or fictional demystification may be brutal, but they save reality from omissions, clichés, stereotypes, and outright lies. They save reality from falsifications, half-truths, and appearances in which it has been trapped or stuck. The past demands the truth about itself. So don't say that you don't know what the truth is. Wise Aristotle says: "A judgment is true if and only if its predicate corresponds to its object."

\* \* \*

Unfortunately, many still believe that a historical novel – indeed, it should be pointed out that in the eyes of many it would be supposedly its only goal and property – should transport us into the realm of the unreal, should help us escape from the real. There are no rules. You make things up, you can fantasize as long as you give your readers hope.

To give one hope. This is a good and noble goal if the fictional work only feeds on the illusion of credibility. *Se non è vero...*<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, would give the novel itself and its author the alleged right to present a fanciful, fantastic, and sometimes completely unreal image of the past.

Write in such a way that your story gives others hope. Is this its only goal? Its sole purpose? Is it only capable of this one thing? Well, if so, it should be added that this is a simplification. What is worse, it weakens or even distorts the very essence of fictional writing – not only historical, by the way – and deprives it of its *raison d'être*.

The novel, like the mythical Antaeus, immediately loses its power when it loses contact with the ground of reality: it must be anchored in the earthly and the human here and now. Let us add, both today and in the past. The past, the actual events, make this ground real: *terra nostra incognita*, from which the source of the story springs forth.

<sup>5</sup> *Se non è vero, è ben trovato* – (Italian) Variant of Giordano Bruno's aphorism: "Even if it is not true, it is a good story."



\* \* \*

So, when it comes to the past, are we allowed to invent and confabulate or not? Of course, we are. The only question is to what a degree? As a reader, I cherish, and sometimes I admire with delight, historical fiction lined with reality, like an infant sucking a mother's breast. It is a natural state. It has existed for centuries. We have the right to create different images of the past.

Literary fiction presents and assimilates the past differently than a historical treatise. Its confabulations allow you to articulate, express, and convey your thoughts without proof. It cannot be proven and yet it is true. In contrast to a scientific dissertation, historical fiction can do more: it can confabulate, imagine, and fantasize.

On the other hand, historical fiction does not necessarily contradict or avoid facts. That is not its proper goal. On the contrary, by confronting them, showing them due respect, discovering, and exposing the past, examining it in detail, it can act to their advantage. It achieves its intended goal not by departing from and/or distancing itself from reality, but by coming as close to it as possible: this is possible thanks to the work of the imagination and its effective use of its means of expression.

One way or another, historical myths are rooted in reality; they spring forth from it and feed on it. Why? There are many possible answers to this question. One would be that they express human desires, both hidden and disclosed, as well as record various psychosocial traumas. These in turn always stem from the pain of existence experienced by the individual, as well as the mutilations and phantomatic suffering of the community, usually caused by the scarcity of the (painfully) real.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

# KEYWORDS

poetics

MYTH

PAST

**ABSTRACT:**

The text examines the complex relations between the past, history, and historical myth, in an interdisciplinary perspective, combining narratology, cognitive studies and cultural anthropology. The author redefines the interdependencies between the terms “the past,” “history,” and “myth,” pointing to the differences between the poetics of different historical narratives, as well as the cognitive potential of the category of the sign, semantic structure, and semantic function in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research on artistic and non-artistic accounts of the past.

narration

methodology

SCIENCE

art

history

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# Stefania Zahorska's Camera Lens

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In 1934, when Stefania Zahorska published her text “What the novel owes film”, film – including the first experiments – had been around for less than 40 years. It took seven years for films to start using (or rather experimenting with) sound, with more or less success. There already existed some great silent cinema masterpieces (*Intolerance*, 1916; *The Last Laugh*, 1924; *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925; *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928), including films by Charlie Chaplin, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, Siergiej Eisenstein. Sound cinema had also already achieved some successes, including the films of Fritz Lang, René Clair, and Josef von Sternberg – the list could be even longer. Nonetheless, film is mostly seen as a form of (more or less sophisticated) entertainment, which in the eyes of its opponents would never deserve to be considered “proper art”, like music, theater, or literature. On the other hand, there are also those who call film “the tenth muse”<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, well-established forms of art with centuries-long

<sup>1</sup> Karol Irzykowski, *Dziesiąta muza: zagadnienia estetyczne kina* [The tenth muse: cinema's aesthetic issues] (Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1924).

traditions are of interest to film. Literature provided film with its “first injection of content and sense”, as Zahorska writes. Since the very beginning, the cinematographer also employed theatrical plays, transferring them to the film tape. The same practice was continued by the silent film, unsure of its own identity, registering in great detail shows imported straight from Broadway.

Filmmakers all around the world draw abundantly from literature, especially novels. Sometimes it is the source of creative solutions, like in the case of the 1916 *Intolerance*, whose creator D.W. Griffith repeatedly stressed that the film's narration was inspired by the structure of Charles Dickens's novels. However, for film, novels are typically a source of attractive anecdotes, dramatic structure, a means of “elevating” film by basing the plot on a well-known author or literary prototype, or a way of gaining popularity by referring to commonly known and (depending on the cultural knowledge) appreciated literary characters. Thus, characters from Zola, Dumas, Mickiewicz, Żeromski, or Sienkiewicz can appear onscreen along with those with origins in cheap, sensational literary works, like *Fantomas*, *Juvex*, *Arsen Lupin* and *Zigomar*.

Aversion to such a marriage between film and literature came not only from film's skeptics. After the Great War, avant-garde groups looking for a new, original language for film, deemed literature a threat and a burden to film. Yet, onscreen avant-garde is no mass production, and such productions shamelessly continued to employ literature, presenting it as – to quote Zahorska again – “twisted as if in a fun-house mirror, thick like a drunkard's face; delicate and sophisticated thoughts turned into cords, into straw wisps”.

Thus, it should not be surprising that there was a common belief that film and the cinema prey on literature, making it incredibly shallow, reducing it to sensational and romance motifs. This was caused not only by the wish to attract the biggest possible audiences, but also by still very imperfect means of narration, a lack of skill in transferring deeper motifs to the screen, bad acting (inaccurately dubbed “theatrical” – nobody taught actors how to act on screen), or, more broadly speaking, imperfect film technique. Generally, almost any onscreen literary adaptation was met with severe criticism.

But suddenly a new, academically accomplished player appeared, an associate professor at the Free Polish University and film critic at “Wiadomości Literackie”, who stated that although many of those accusations were accurate, the novel was beginning to owe something to film, as well. This was a daring idea in 1934 in Poland. So, who was the author of “What the novel owes film”?

Stefania Zahorska was born on 25 April 1889 in Kraków<sup>2</sup>, as Ernestyna Stefania Lesser, the youngest of four sisters in a middle-class family of assimilated Jews. She studied in Kraków and Berlin, and had passed her high school exams (in Hungarian!) while living with her older

<sup>2</sup> In the light of controversies surrounding the date of Zahorska's birth it should be mentioned that the correct date was identified by Anna Pilch, on the basis of documentary evidence: Anna Pilch, *Symbolika form i kolorów: o krytyce artystycznej Stefanii Zahorskiej* [Symbolism of forms and colors: on Stefania Zahorska's artistic criticism] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2004).

sister in Budapest. Later, in the 1930s, she would become a sworn translator from Hungarian. She had unusually broad interests. She studied medicine and chemistry, and in 1919 graduated from Jagiellonian University with a degree in art history. She received top grades for her thesis on the early Renaissance in Poland (published in 1921), in which she made a highly interesting claim that the Italian Renaissance came to Poland via Hungary<sup>3</sup>. This was a classic example of Zahorska's original way of thinking, which would become the main feature distinguishing her reflections on culture.

She began writing articles in 1919 for magazines, mostly devoted to art history; however, in the same year she also wrote a text which showed her interest in Freud, to whom she would refer many times in later years<sup>4</sup>. Most of her papers written in 1919–1929 are on the visual arts. Among other things, she wrote two popular monographs on Jan Matejko and Eugeniusz Żak, published as a part of a series of artistic monographs by Gebethner and Wolff<sup>5</sup>. In 1921 she moved to Warsaw, where she got a job as an assistant professor of history of art at the Polish Free University. She was an art history lecturer in Warsaw, as well as in the university's Łódź division.

The scope of her interests, like the scope of her other activities, was indeed impressive, and included the visual arts, psychology, sociology, philosophy, history, literature, and the theory of art, as well as teaching and education, which she treated very seriously. She gave free Sunday lectures on Wyspiański, Matejko, Cézanne, Stanisław Witkiewicz in Collegium Publicum, as well as numerous guest lectures. She was also a lecturer at I Miejska Szkoła Rękodzielnicza [an urban handicrafts school] – a job she truly enjoyed – where she taught future milliners, tailors, lacemakers, and corsetieres how to look at a piece of art, and how to perceive color, space, and functionality. This was genuinely noble work at the grass roots level. According to surviving evidence, she was a phenomenal teacher, and kept in touch with some of her students even after the war. Her many essays, reviews, and articles show her passion for teaching, for example, her use of such language as “let us go back to...”, “as we remember”. It can also be seen in the academic form “to recapitulate”. And perhaps “What the novel owes film” was originally in fact a lecture...?

She started to write about film in the mid-1920s, and she remained faithful to it until the outbreak of World War II, as well as after she emigrated from Poland – although she wrote on film far less often then. She always perceived it as an autonomous art form; she was open to experiments and original ways of using “moving pictures”, but she also saw it as a significant ingredient of Polish popular culture, one which had a great impact on contemporary people.

<sup>3</sup> Stefania Zahorska, *O pierwszych śladach odrodzenia w Polsce* [On the first traces of rebirth in Poland], vol. 2 (Kraków: Prace Komisji Historii Sztuki PAU, 1921).

<sup>4</sup> Stefania Zahorska, “Twórczość i świadomość” [Creativity and awareness], *Wianki*, No 3 (1919): 13–14.

<sup>5</sup> Stefania Zahorska and Jan Matejko, *Jan Matejko* (Warszawa: Gebethner & Wolff, 1925); Stefania Zahorska, *Eugeniusz Żak* (Warszawa: Gebethner & Wolff, 1927).

A text she wrote in August of 1927, and published in September in “Wiadomości Literackie”, which was a broader reflection on the contemporary German film culture, should be considered her “film writing debut”<sup>6</sup>. Although it was her first text on film, it is clear that she must have been interested in the topic for a long time. In the text, she reveals most of her future (academic) interests, hopes, prejudices, and even idiosyncrasies. The latter was connected to the conviction that the randomness of the people connected with the “film business”, who sought only quick profits, “the curse of trade calculation” killed film and any courage to experiment.

Zahorska's interests, and probably also her ambitions, went well beyond essay writing, publicism, or criticism. In September 1927 she presented an essay during the Second Polish Philosophical Congress entitled “Formal issues in film”<sup>7</sup> on the aesthetics panel, alongside Władysław Tatarkiewicz, Stanisław Ossowski, Edward Stamm, and Jan M. Szuman. This is one of the most important academic texts on film published in Poland in the interwar period, and was later developed into a full-fledged subject of academic research. With some caution, one could claim that Zahorska (like Karol Irzykowski) was a precursor in terms of reflection on film in terms of semiotic categories. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that she was the first to introduce film to the academic environment. Interestingly, Zahorska – a well-educated art historian – decided to introduce film to the academic humanities via philosophy rather than art-related disciplines. Perhaps she decided that looking at film from the perspective of art history would limit it, close it within the interpretative field of a moving picture, whereas she saw this phenomenon as deserving of more attention.

In 1928 she tried to release her own social, literary, and artistic weekly, “Wiek XX” [20<sup>th</sup> century], publishing authors such as Tadeusz Peiper, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, and Władysław Strzemiński, as well as Ilja Erenburg's articles about artistic life in the USSR. Zahorska wrote extensively about the visual arts, including exhibitions, artistic schools, and film. In “Wiek XX” she published one of her most important critical texts on silent film, “Film in mothballs”, which was her deepest, most inquisitive analysis of the weaknesses of Polish cinema<sup>8</sup>.

Zahorska wrote extensively and quickly. She published her texts in a variety of magazines – both those aimed at intellectuals and at readers of Sunday cultural inserts. She was very good at adjusting her writing to her readership. In the early 1930s she became a film critic for “Wiadomości Literackie”, where up until the outbreak of World War II she published over 500 film reviews. As a film critic, she could be ruthless, and even cruel in the face of incompetence, “profiteering”, and patriotic kitsch, and her reviews were not forgotten, even many

<sup>6</sup> Stefania Zahorska, “Z ruchu filmowego w Niemczech” [On the German film movement], *Wiadomości Literackie* 195, No 39 (1927); The text has also been published by Anna Nasiłowska in Stefania Zahorska, *Wybór pism: Reportaże, publicystyka, eseje* [A selection of texts: reportages, publicism, essays] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Stefania Zahorska, “Zagadnienia formalne filmu” [Film's formal issues], *Przegląd Filozoficzny XXXI*, No 1–2 (1928): 192–99; For an extended discussion of that text see Pilch, *Symbolika form i kolorów* [Symbolism of forms and colors], especially p. 128–137.

<sup>8</sup> Stefania Zahorska, “Film w naftalinie” [Film in mothballs], *Wiek XX*, No. 3 (1928): 4.

years later. She was open to many possibilities, and accepted the appearance of sound film with curiosity.

She was distinguished in popularizing masterpieces of Soviet cinema, which was poorly known in interwar Poland (or rather almost completely unknown). In the latter half of 1934 she went to the USSR, where she participated in Eisenstein's, Pudowkin's, and Kuleszow's seminars at the GIK (Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography) and learned about the most important artistic disputes among the Soviet cinema's elites. She loved the local atmosphere of "everyone's equal work", the enthusiasm, and work "without bluff, a specific film applesauce". One of the effects of that trip was a series of excellent reportages published in "Wiadomości Literackie"<sup>9</sup>, not only about the Russian film milieu, but also about everyday life there. Zahorska did not hide anything nor cover anything up (to the extent of what she actually saw). It turned out that she also had a great talent for this genre, as evidenced by both the-above mentioned texts, as well as those from Germany.

Let us pause in 1934. Between her stay in Germany and the trip to Russia she wrote "What the novel owes film". In other words, a film enthusiast, fascinated with Eisenstein, Pudowkin, Wiertow, and Ruttmann pointed the sensitive camera lens towards literature. It was a completely original idea considering that in some groups the opinion that film was secondary to literature was prevalent for the next several decades. As an open-minded person, Zahorska focused on how film could potentially benefit literature, rather than on the cliché statement that "film preys on literature" (of which she was perfectly aware)<sup>10</sup>.

Several Polish novels were at the center of her interest: *Żółty krzyż* [Yellow cross] by Andrzej Strug, *Czarne skrzydła* [Black wings] by Juliusz Kaden Bandrowski, *The Street of Crocodiles* by Bruno Schultz, *Zazdrość i medycyna* [Jealousy and medicine] (a novel) and "Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach" [Scandal in Wesołe Bagniska] (a short story) by Michał Choromański. Using such examples, she demonstrated how film inspirations influenced a given work of literature, a transformation of the fleeting, intangible, abstract into visible, sensual pictures. How a film picture transformed literary spacetime.

When she wrote about the novel's varied, multi-layer character, the simultaneity of phenomena, the intertwining of different layers of reality, combining unrelated phenomena, which Zahorska treats as evidence of film's "infecting" the novel, she also reveals her greatest passion in terms of film – editing. Montage, which is key to film as a form of art, and which is the basis of the deepest, the most potent metaphors in late silent cinema. Using the example of *The Street of Crocodiles*, Zahorska argues that there is no doubt that film played a role in the shaping of contemporary literary metaphor, which became more sensual, dynamic, plastic, and concrete; it became a moving metaphor.

<sup>9</sup> See Stefania Zahorska, *Wybór pism: Reportaże, publicystyka, eseje* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>For an extended discussion see Małgorzata Hendrykowska, "O szczególnych powinowactwach literatury i kina w refleksji Stefanii Zahorskiej" [On the special relationships between literature and the cinema], *Przestrzenie Teorii*, No 32 (2019): 167–79; and Anna Pilch, *Symbolika form i kolorów*, 39–40.



Are we convinced by all of Zahorska's ideas and examples? Doubtlessly one could argue with some of them. So what makes this relatively short 1934 text so significant? Zahorska successfully convinces the reader that the relations between film and literature can be described outside of the traditional domain of pure adaptation, in terms of metapoetics, lexical aesthetics, and the moving picture. She points out how one can go beyond the discourse on the similarities between an onscreen adaptation and its prototype, and that the relation between the two is not unidirectional: from literature to film. In Poland, hers was an important and precursory voice in terms of perceiving deeper relations between literature and film.

Zahorska focused on contemporary literature. Just a few years later two other, previously unknown texts would be published, written in 1908 and 1911, in which the "cinematicity" of literature was clear. The first one was a one-act play by Karol Irzykowski, *Sprzedane samobójstwo* [Sold suicide] (1908)<sup>11</sup>, in which inspiration by film is demonstrated in the topic, and *Widziadła* [Phantasms] by Bolesław Prus (1911)<sup>12</sup>, a novella which is also a ready-made screenplay, a testament of "film-like thinking". More such examples can be found in works by Reymont, Żeromski, Belmont, etc; however, none has described the phenomenon quite like Zahorska. In her opinion, film significantly impacted the novel, which found a place for itself within it and internalized film's means of expression, sensualism, temporal ellipticity, spatial construction, simultaneous narration, dynamics, and the specificity of description resulting from the unmatched possibilities of the camera lens. "Modern literature looks at the world through a magnifying glass, from close-up; it has become analytical and sensual", as Zahorska observes. Even if those tendencies appeared by themselves and were not transplanted from film, "film's role in maintaining them and shaping the imagination of young authors and readers is doubtless. Infection with a concrete, sensual way of looking at the world stems from the screen, attunes and sets people's imagination, directly or indirectly shaping the written picture".

In her considerations regarding film inspirations which were important for literature, Stefania Zahorska is neither a nouveau-riche nor dogmatic person. She is not trying to convince us that the dynamics and sensualism of film dominated literature. Although she does not specifically write about this, I believe she is completely aware of it. In 1934 the cinema was commonplace. Everyone went to the cinema. Thus, at that time, there was a certain collective imagination about the world, characterized by a dynamic, "trembling" and "jerky" sensualism, by variety and multidimensionality, which affected the construction of the novel, drama, film, photographic press coverage, and the poetics of the poster. Writers, in spite of their individual differences, remained in the same circuit, cultural rhythm, moving in the same iconic space, in the same orbit, in a world that consisted only of props and scenes. Was it even possible to be deaf to the world of the moving pictures?

<sup>11</sup>Karol Irzykowski, "Człowiek przed soczewką, czyli sprzedane samobójstwo. Dramat w 1 akcie" [A man in front of a lens – a sold suicide], *Pion*, No 24–25 (1938).

<sup>12</sup>Zygmunt Szweykowski, "Nowela Prusa 'Widziadła'" [Prus's novella 'Phantasms'], *Pion*, No 15 (1936).

This was Stefania Zahorska's situation in 1934. She was 45. There were still many important things ahead of her: hundreds of excellent film reviews, articles on history of art and contemporary art, essays on literature and reviews, her own plays, novels, and short stories, written in Poland and in exile. In 1939 she first fled to Paris, and then to London, she worked in exile, uncompromising in her fight against evil. Her life ended in a rather sudden and unexpected death; forgotten, in a foreign land.

She was characterized by an unusual, deep and profound intelligence. To my mind, she was the most acute, inquisitive, and incisive film critic of the interwar period. She was a sophisticated woman in the best meaning of the word, brave and independent, open, fluent in several languages, travelling, known for her elegance and manner, who was friends with the intellectual elites (and not just Polish).

Stefania Zahorska died in London on 5 April 1961, at the age of 72. In Poland, her death went unnoticed. Her versatile works were only appreciated again at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup>.

## What the novel owes film<sup>14</sup>

### Stefania Zahorska

Film came to viewers' eyes in all its primitive wildness. It ran onscreen accompanied by gunshots, broken plates, demolished backstages, speckled with flour and cream thrown in the face; it introduced such deep issues as chases on pillows and struggles with one's own shoes or nose as its innate themes and problems.

<sup>13</sup>Danuta Karcz was the first to write about Zahorska's film criticism: "Stefanii Zahorskiej walka o treść" [Stefania Zahorska's fight for content]. "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 1962 No 1-2, p. 47-92. Maja Elżbieta Cybulska published some important archival materials in her London book "Potwierdzone istnienie. Archiwum Stefanii Zahorskiej" [Confirmed existence. Stefania Zahorska's archive]. London 1988. More works appeared later: Stefania Zahorska, *Szkice o literaturze i sztuce* [Sketches on literature and art], edited by Paweł Kądziała, Warszawa 1995, Stefania Zahorska, "Przychodź do mnie". Listy do Leonii Jabłonkówny [Come to me. Letters to Leonia Jabłonkówna]. Edited and introduction by Maja Elżbieta Cybulska. London 1998; Anna Pilch, *Symbolika form i kolorów. O krytyce artystycznej Stefanii Zahorskiej* [Symbolism of forms and colors. On Stefania Zahorska's artistic criticism]. Kraków 2004. Stefania Zahorska, *Wybór pism. Reportaże, publicystyka, eseje* [Stefania Zahorska, A selection of texts. Reportages, publicism, essays] selection, introduction, and edition by Anna Nasiłowska, Warszawa 2010. Anna Nasiłowska, *Interdyscyplinarny umysł Stefanii Zahorskiej* [Stefania Zahorska's interdisciplinary mind], "Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki" 2012, No 3-4. More recently scholars have been focusing also on the literary output of Zahorska. See for example Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, *Po tamtej stronie tekstów. Literatura polska a nowoczesna kultura obecności* [On the other side of texts. Polish literature and the modern culture of presence]. Poznań 2013, especially the chapter: "Ruch powstający w innym" [Movement originating in the other]. *Modernizowanie psychoanalizy w emigracyjnych powieściach Stefanii Zahorskiej* [Modernized psychoanalyses in Stefania Zahorska's exile novels]. Jakub Osiński, *Biedni emigranci patrzą na getto. O Smoczey 13 Stefanii Zahorskiej* [Poor emigrant are looking at the ghetto. On Smocza 13 and Stefania Zahorska]. "Teksty Drugie" 2018 No 3, p. 399-417.

<sup>14</sup>The text was originally printed in "Kurier Literacko-Naukowy" 1934 No 29 (it was a weekly extra to the popular Cracow "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny"). The text was also published in Anna Nasiłowska (W.): *Stefania Zahorska, Wybór pism. Reportaże, publicystyka, eseje. Wybór, wstęp i opracowanie* Anna Nasiłowska. Warszawa 2010, p.285-290.

When audiences were no longer impressed merely with the movement of onscreen pictures, with the very fact that they can see a dog wagging its tail – it turned out that the cultural level of film needed to be substantially raised to make it digestible. And who was supposed to do this, to undertake this hard educational effort? Literature, of course. It entered film's life twice: the first time, at the very beginning, giving it the first injection of content and sense, when the silent film was adapting great historical novels, such as *Quo vadis*<sup>15</sup> and *The Last Days of Pompeii*<sup>16</sup>, when similarly to late-19th-century naturalistic novels, film stories about fallen girls were made, or when a more concise and logical structure of film police dramas were taken from detective romances.

And then, for the second time, almost yesterday, literature entered film's life: this happened when film started to talk, or rather mumble, when it turned out that it had nothing to say by itself, and thus needed to borrow language and words. Who from? Literature, of course. First from the theater, then from the novel. From masterpieces of world literature, from *The Song of the Nibelungs*<sup>17</sup> to the latest romances. When it comes to Polish literature, very few managed to escape the naïve and wild greed of film – not even Mickiewicz, Sienkiewicz, or Żeromski<sup>18</sup>, or many others. Literature paid a high price for these borrowings and transformations. Its face appeared on the screen twisted as if in a fun-house mirror, thick like a drunkard's face; its thoughts, delicate and sophisticated, turned into cords, into straw wisps. Indeed, literature has paid and is still paying a high price for its educational work on film.

However, we all know this. There is no need to talk about this anymore. Well-educated gentlemen have already beefed on film, its thoughtlessness, its preying on literature. Who knows, they may have hurt film, they may have overlooked some of its valuable properties. Those, which – regardless of the incredible stupidity of screenplays and staging – nonetheless introduce a distinct tone in the perception of the world, a new and peculiar attitude to reality – so new that they are inaccessible to other forms of art. Yes indeed: there are also such fields, in which the uncouth savage, film, is leading. In which it is able to fascinate even literature, though it is far smarter than film. In which film's suggestion effuses almost hypnotizingly and so strongly that it eats into every page of a book. Yes, doubtlessly film does influence literature, and not just the theater – even novel. This stupid, savage, barbaric, uncouth film.

<sup>15</sup>In the times of the silent cinema Sienkiewicz's *Quo vadis* was adapted several times, for example in a short film produced by Pathé, directed by Lucien Nonguet (1901) and in a film entitled *In the times of the first Christians* (*Au temps des premiers Chrétiens*) directed by André Calmette (1909). In the case of those earliest films we are talking about references to the literary prototype rather than adaptations. The feature-length Italian *Quo vadis?* directed by Enrico Guazzoni and released by Cines (1913) and the German-Italian *Quo vadis?* directed by George Jacoby and Gabriell D'Annunzio, with Emil Jannings as Neron (1924).

<sup>16</sup>An Italian silent film produced by "Ambrosio Film", directed by Arturo Ambrosio and Luigi Maggi (1908)

<sup>17</sup>*The Song of the Nibelungs*, directed by Fritz Lang. Screenplay by Thea von Harbou based on the Old Germanic 8th century poem *Nibelungenlied*. Camera Carl Hoffmann. Starring Margatethe Schön, Paul Richter, Theodor Loos i in. Prod. UFA, Niemcy (1924).

<sup>18</sup>Zahorska refers here to the numerous adaptations of, among others, Sienkiewicz: *Bartek Zwycięzca* [Bartek the winner] (1923), *Janko Muzykant* (1930), Żeromski: *Dzieje grzechu* [The story of sin] (1911), (1933), *Uroda życia* [Beauty of life] (1921), *Rok 1863* [The year 1863] based on *Wierna rzeka* [Constant river] (1922), *Przedwiośnie* [Early spring] (1928) and Mickiewicz: *Czaty* [In wait] (1920), *Pan Tadeusz* [Mr Tadeusz] (1928).

However, a funny *qui pro quo* takes places here, as if a complete mix up of paternity, an unclear marital status or descent. For in discussing film's influence on literature one should focus especially on the approach to time; the question of the simultaneity of several plot-lines; the problem of the condensing long phenomena into a short period of time; the issue of a screen's breathlessness, in which pieces of car wheels, of horse legs, flashes of light in car windows and ruffled strings of horse hair replace the demonstrated gallop of horses and a car being driven. Or let us take the opposite phenomenon – slow motion, in which every movement is broken down to slow, individual pieces, and tells us what impetus and running consist of, what an object's movement consists of, what the object itself consists of. And yet those concepts, remarkably characteristic of film and organically connected with technology, first came to life in poets, the so-called imaginists and futurists, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – and they were dedicated to literature. Film accidentally became their heir and executor – the fantastic ideas of futurist writers were unexpectedly realized in film. Is it not funny when a legitimate son turns out to be the spitting image of some other woman?

Time, so expandable and prone to cuts in film, has been treated as a conventional value, a scheme in literature. The author obviously did not tell their protagonists' life story hour by hour, taking some shortcuts and leaps, marked with "many years had passed". Events that happened simultaneously were presented chronologically, one after another, like in the theater. For example, a young girl is dancing at a ball, and after the second act we can see her fiancé, who is dying. We do not immediately grasp that this is happening simultaneously, that he dies precisely when she is having fun. The same scene looks different in the cinema: simultaneity is almost directly served to the viewer. We can see the smiling mouth and fading eyes almost next to each other. Two strings of phenomena, sometimes an even higher number of plotlines are happening in front of our eyes, on the same piece of film tape. A dancing girl, a dying fiancé, an indifferent street, a restless mother.

This multi-track and multi-layer character of phenomena, this mutual intertwining of various surfaces of a film's reality has doubtlessly inspired literature. Today's novel technique frequently employs the technique of combining seemingly completely unrelated phenomena. A writer leaps from one event to another, seeking only the unity of time. A famous French novelist, Jules Romains, begins his multi-volume novel on October 6<sup>th</sup>, early in the morning<sup>19</sup>. He is looking, as if through a camera lens, inside Parisian apartments, he goes from one house to another, projecting on pages (as if on a screen) a variety of events taking place in different parts of the city at the same time. The American Dos Passos<sup>20</sup> employs a similar technique in his novels, and it is also becoming increasingly more common in Polish literature. In the prewar novels by Andrzej Strug, especially in his last trilogy, *Żółty krzyż*<sup>21</sup>, different layers of reality are intertwined, dream and reality, the truth of life,

<sup>19</sup>A 27-volume roman-fleuve by Jules Romain (1885-1972) *Men of Good Will* (1932-1947). Polish edition of volumes.1-4 (1933-1939).

<sup>20</sup>Dos Passos (1896-1970) American novelist and journalist; author of 42 novels, including the U.S.A. trilogy *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *1919* (1932), *The Big Money* (1936).

<sup>21</sup>Andrzej Strug, *Żółty krzyż* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1933).

the impression of a fantasy. In the novel *Zazdrość i medycyna*<sup>22</sup> or the short story *Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach*<sup>23</sup>, both by the young Choromański, who has been honored by the Polish Academy of literature, one can sense a greedy wish to express this worrying simultaneity of phenomena – the author frequently returns to the initial moment, similarly to what happens in the cinema.

In a slowed picture, which the writer shows to the reader, each quality of the described pictures are exaggerated, becoming individual, isolated, sensual, tangible. You can almost see every pore of the skin, almost touch each roughness of the surface, smell and taste each object. In the past, it was enough to describe a beautiful protagonist by simply stating that “her skin was like velvet”. Today the young Ważyk describes a young lady’s beauty routine as follows: “She revealed an inhumanely transformed face, shining with oil like a buttered bun”. Kaden Bandrowski writes in his *Czarne skrzydła*: “He saw a large piece of skin on a woman’s back spread on a blue sofa. Red, shiny hands were weltering in it, kneading it like dough”<sup>24</sup>.

In the past, a writer would describe a neglected garden as, say, “full of lush vegetation” – and that would be it. Today general characteristics – as a notion – is changing into a defined description, unique, full of inimitable details, so clear as if it was a film. The young Bruno Schulz describes a part of a garden: “There those goggly burdoch goggled like jades sitting, taking up space, half-eaten by their own mad skirts”. Or: “The air (...) cut with lightning of shiny horseflies, furious sun, it was cracking like invisible rattles (...)”<sup>25</sup>.

Modern literature looks at the world through a magnifying glass, from close-up, it has become analytical and sensual. Perhaps these tendencies have appeared in it by themselves, and were not transplanted from film. Nonetheless, film’s role in maintaining them and shaping the imagination of young authors and readers is doubtless. Infection with the concrete, sensual way of looking at the world stems from the screen, attunes and sets people’s imagination, directly or indirectly shapes the written picture.

Let us look at how literary metaphors have changed. In the past, people wrote about “sheets white as snow” or that “he buried himself in the sheets like in hay”. How static, motionless and general those thin metaphors seem compared the one in Schultz: “... he was falling into whitish clouds, strands and piles of cool feathers (...) and the sheets around him were growing, swelling, and souring – they were growing over him with masses of heavy, white dough”.

This type of metaphor is not only extravagant sensualism, but also an example of dynamics, of a metaphor on the move. One picture turns into another, flows in front of the viewer-reader’s eyes, changes with words like pictures in the cinema.

<sup>22</sup>Michał Choromański, *Zazdrość i medycyna* (Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff, 1933).

<sup>23</sup>Michał Choromański, “Skandal w Wesołych Bagniskach” – novel printed in instalments in “Gazeta Polska” (1934).

<sup>24</sup>Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, *Czarne skrzydła* (Katowice, 1928).

<sup>25</sup>Quotes from *The Street of Crocodiles*, Tow. Rój. Warszawa 1933 (1934), passages from a short story *Sierpień* [August].

There is one more type of novel that has been heavily affected by film: a novel whose action is made mostly of the accretion of facts, in which events are running through the pages as quickly as the tricks of a runaway villain in a film police drama. In such a novel the author approaches their protagonists as if from the outside, showing them in motion, at work, characterizing them through actions and situations. For example, this is how the young Gojawiczyńska's *Ziemia Elżbiety* [Elizabeth's land]<sup>26</sup> is written. But this kind of film's influence on literature requires a more personal and extensive discussion. Let us recapitulate. Let us state that we did not organize a race nor a comparison of achievements. Why would we? It would mean a great unpleasantness for the young urchin – film. Let us agree now and without paltering that it is no match for its grand and serious mentor – literature. However, let us allow it to get its own back in at least one small category. Let us admit that film shapes the sense of concreteness, that it transforms intangible, abstract terms and notions into visible pictures, plastic, tangible shapes. It makes sensualism permeate imagination.

Let us also admit that film has made our world more dynamic, that it has moved it from its foundations. It also deals with time masterfully and ruthlessly, by arbitrarily cutting, lengthening, and repositioning phenomena. Here film is a reformer. And here even the dignified written word gives in to it.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

<sup>26</sup>See Pola Gojawiczyńska, *Ziemia Elżbiety* [Elizabeth's land] (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze "Rój", 1934).

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# KEYWORDS

*film criticism*

**Stefania Zahorska**

FILM

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novel

*film inspirations in novels*

## ABSTRACT:

The vast and varied literary output of Stefania Zahorska (1889-1961) including, among others, articles on art history and theory, philosophy, psychology, history of culture, out of which reflections on film theory and criticism have the most prominent position. Zahorska was the most distinguished film critic of the Polish interwar period, due not only to her talent for writing and criticism, but also her erudition, education, and most importantly, independent judgment. While in the 1930s film was commonly seen as a parasite preying on literature, Zahorska in her essay "What literature owes film", published in 1934 in *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy*, states that the novel was also slowly getting something from film. She focused on the contemporary Polish novel and the potential benefits which literature could gain from film. She convincingly demonstrated how film inspirations influenced literary concreteness, how – under film's influence – the spatiotemporal model changed in literature. By analyzing novels "infected" with film, she pointed to its role in shaping contemporary literary metaphors. Her originality of thought stemmed from her breaking from popular discourse regarding the similarities between an adaptation and its source, and her indicating that the relation between film and literature is not simply unidirectional: from literature to film. It can be described beyond the traditional domain of adaptation, in terms of metapoetics and the aesthetics of word and moving pictures. In Poland hers was an important, pioneering voice in terms of how the relations between film and literature were seen.



film editing

space time

metapoetics

simultaneous narration

time and space ellipticity

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