

Polska Sztuka Ludowa

KONTEKSTY

◆ CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY ◆ ETHNOGRAPHY ◆ ART ◆

ANTHROPOLOGY between Science and Art

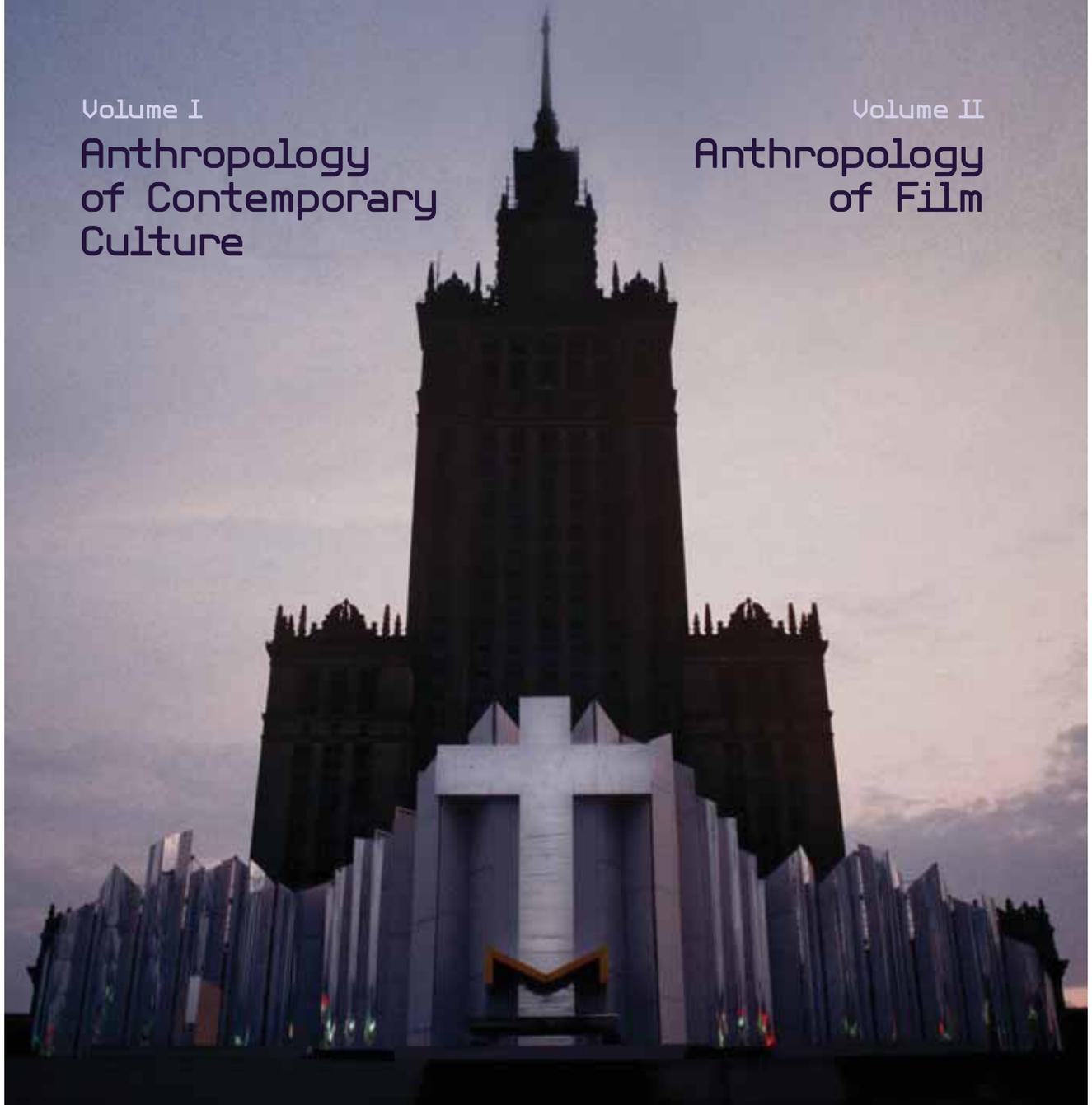
ANTHOLOGY OF TEXTS FROM THE QUARTERLY "KONTEKSTY" (CONTEXTS)

Volume I

Anthropology
of Contemporary
Culture

Volume II

Anthropology
of Film





Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw.
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On the cover: altar erected in Defilad Square (in front of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw), where Holy Mass was celebrated during the visit-pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II in Poland, 1987. © Photo: Anna Beata Bohdziewicz

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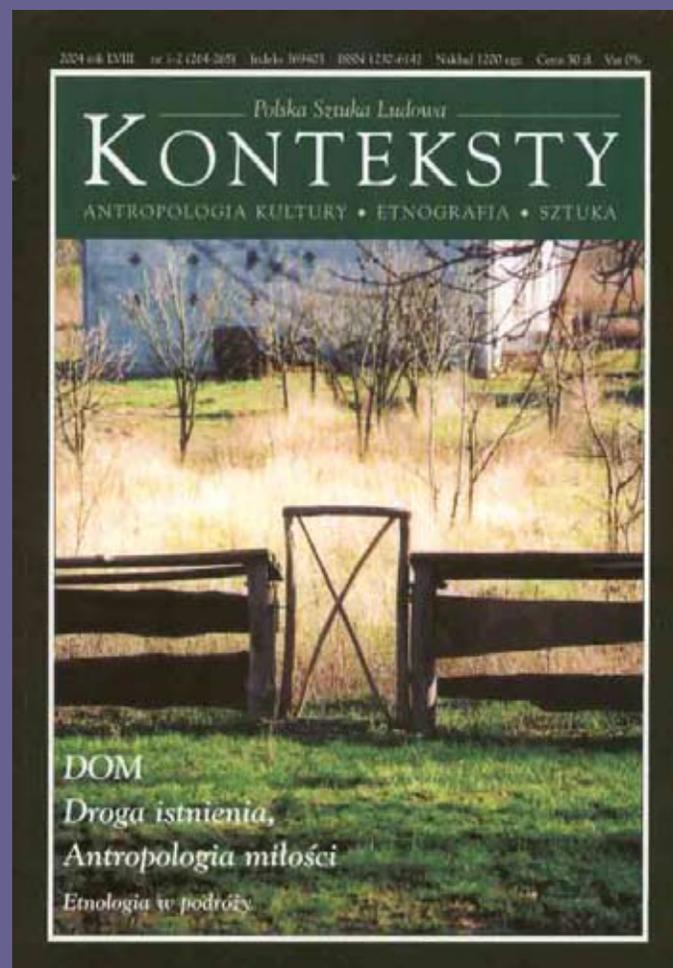
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Volume I

Anthropology of Contemporary Culture



Cover: Photo by Kinga Łozińska

The selected texts presented in this edition appeared in KONTEKSTY from the late 1970s to the 1990s and are featured up to this day; inspired by the experiences of structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology and hermeneutics they reflect the spirit of our periodical. The anthropology of contemporary society and culture, the anthropology of memory, historical anthropology, the anthropology of literature, the anthropology of the town and, finally, the anthropology of film and visual anthropology comprise characteristic fields readily pursued by authors publishing their studies in KONTEKSTY and cooperating both with the quarterly and the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Film and Audiovisual Arts at the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Science, which publishes it.

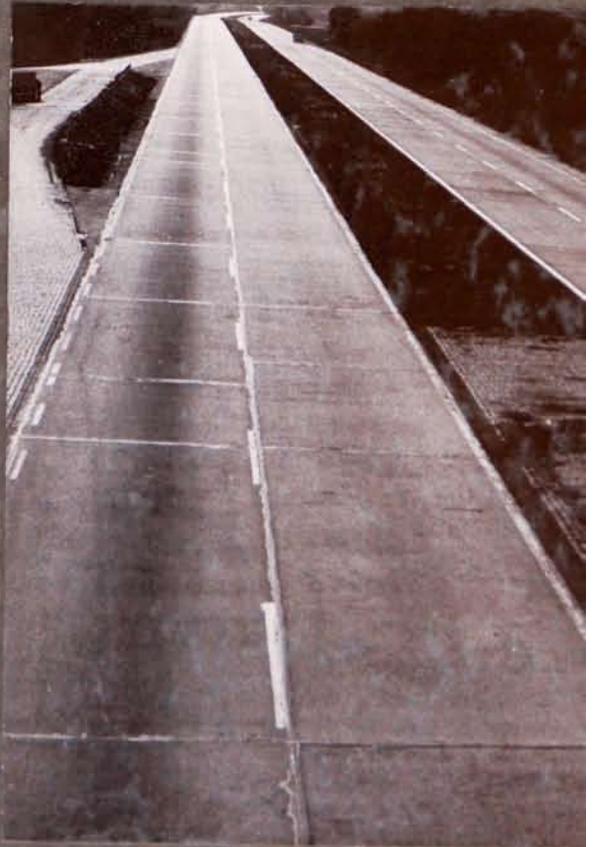
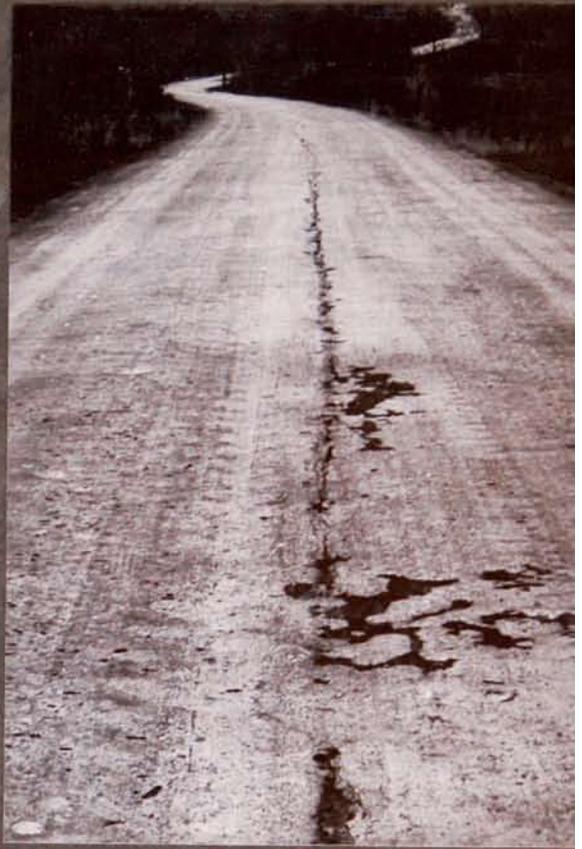
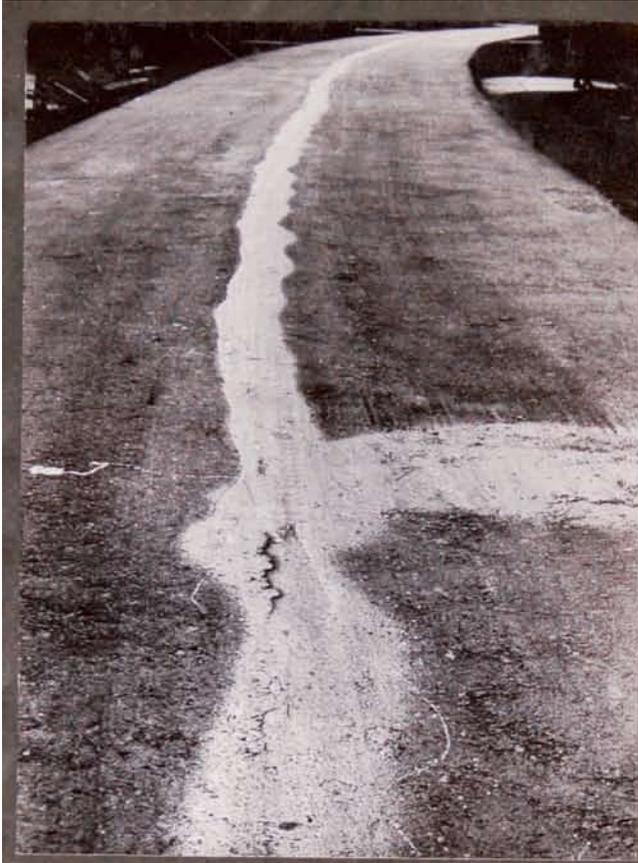
We dedicate this collection of texts to the memory of Professor Aleksander Jackiewicz, author of *Antropologia Filmu* (1975) and numerous publications dealing with film studies.

The special English-language issue of "KONTEKSTY" was prepared as part of the "National Programme for the Development of the Humanities". We would like to treat our publication as an opportunity to share noteworthy research tendencies in Polish studies concerning the anthropology of contemporary culture and anthropology of film discussed in our quarterly. It is our intention to indicate interesting phenomena in this field by highlighting anthropology of culture as an experience of reflections as well as interpretations developed between Anthropology and Art (between Science and Art), and to present "KONTEKSTY" as important for reflections on the anthropology of contemporary culture and anthropology of film, involving authors from all academic centers dealing with anthropological studies in Poland.

In memoriam *Professor Aleksander Jackiewicz*



Krzysztof M. Bednarski, *Victoria*, 1983.



Roads. Photo: Zofia Rydet

The Symbol in Ethnography

It is unnecessary to explain why a consensus regarding the meaning of the word “symbol” could be of value for all sorts of studies on art or literature, Marcin Czerwiński wrote in *Symbol dzisiaj*,¹ published in “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”. Regardless of the answer to the posed question: *Is such an agreement possible?* each attempt at a presentation of assorted stands concerning the comprehension of the nature of the symbol appears to be equally valuable.

Numerous emergent studies dealing time and again with reflections about the symbol confirm and reflect this need for rendering precise both the term “symbol” and the need for constantly delving into its meaning. Although such inquiries are undertaken in assorted fields of research, and formulated in various languages, it is possible to find numerous tangent points, similar intuitions, concurrent lines of reflection, shared motifs, and alike problems. It would be thus needless to explain the benefits of such investigations for representatives of ethnography, ethnology, and the anthropology of culture – domains that have made such a considerable contribution, and continue to do so, to research dealing with the symbol.

In the cited article Marcin Czerwiński frequently drew attention to science’s enmity towards the symbol, the distance and even antagonism between the two: *Science behaves towards primary language only partly as an opponent, but in relation to the symbol it maintains total opposition (...)*.² He went on: *True, in the course of centuries the role of discursive statements incessantly grew in multiple if not all domains of social life. Science, in the form in which we see it today (or rather in which it was seen still yesterday), has questioned the rank of symbolic statements.*³

In the case of ethnography and its attitude towards the symbol the situation remained more complicated from the very onset, and generally speaking did not deviate from the general model of science. The most vivid evidence is the absence of the entry: “symbol” in the contemporary *Słownik etnologiczny*. (Ethnological Dictionary)⁴ In the suitable spot the authors refer the

reader to the term: “sign”. Although the word: “symbol” as such appears many times on the pages of this book in assorted combinations, variants, and contexts (e.g. in entries on “symbolic culture”, “myth”, “*sacrum - profanum*”), and although the authors in various places stress the part performed by the symbol in culture, as in the case of Zofia Sokolewicz in the entry: “anthropology of communication” - (...) *It is argued (S. K. Langer) that the terms like “sign”, “meaning” in all their variants are the dominating terms in our times, and that the sign, the symbol, the processes of signifying and communicating belong to our current cultural resources. Since the 1960s at the latest these terms are being introduced into ethnological sciences – we would look in vain for reference to “symbol” or “symbolism” as one of the numerous trends listed by the author and which consider studying the symbol.*⁵ To put it in more graphic terms, in this contemporary compendium of knowledge about ethnological terms the “symbol” collapsed and concealed itself amidst numerous entries merged with “sign”. If, however, one takes a closer look at the entry: “sign” then one could say that it had been placed there by force or, to put in gentler terms: “inserted”. Despite the fact that we read: *Symbols might be regarded as a special group of symbolic signs*, and it is mentioned (with reference only to E. Cassirer and S. K. Langer) that: *The concept of the symbol occurs often within a wider conception of man comprehended as animal symbolicum*, only half a column out of a total of nine devoted to the entry on the sign had been intended for the symbol.⁶ In this manner, so to speak, the sign swallowed the symbol.

Meanwhile, different authors, such as P. Ricoeur, M. Bakhtin, S. Avierintsev, Y. Lotman and others accentuated in their characteristics of the symbol the differences between the sign and the symbol. In his eidetic analysis Ricoeur considered the specificity of the symbol contrasted with the sign, the allegory, and the myth: *symbols are signs (...) but not every sign is a symbol.*⁷ In a similar vein, Avierintsev, while writing about the symbol as a universal category of aesthetics added that it can be best discussed *via* an opposition to adjoining categories: on the one hand, the image, and on the other hand, the sign.⁸ Is, however, a dictionary of contemporary (or rather: yesterday’s) science, depicted by Marcin Czerwiński and oriented exclusively on “ejecting ambiguities”, familiar with only one way of enunciation: *a discourse meeting the sharpened criteria of explicitivity, a science protecting itself against the wavering of meaning*, capable of accepting and including such “imprecise” and uncompleted sequences as those that we may come across among tireless researchers dealing with the symbol, which, in my opinion, can best bring us closer to its essence:

The word and the image — (an object, an ethnographer could add at this point – Z. B.) — are symbolic when they contain something more than that, which can be recognised at first glance (C. G. Jung).⁹

*The memory of a symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolic textual surrounding (Y. Lotman).*¹⁰

Not only do we live in a world of symbols, but the world of symbols lives in us (J. Chevalier).¹¹

Finally, a contemporary science dictionary could include sentences whose veracity, in the existential experience, could be confirmed by many; the meaning of such sentences appears to be particularly legible and important as regards studies on the still unclear processes of artistic creativity (regardless whether we encounter it within the range of primitive folk art or high art).

We do not embellish our experiences with symbols but it is they, which cooperate with our experience via processes of affiliation, which we understand only partially. To symbolize means to arrange those particles and elements of a flowing stream of experiences, which, once united, create luminescence, temporary or permanent rays, in which a part of the cosmos, a corner of our habitat or some dark subterranean labyrinth lightens up.

*(...) At any rate, the first syntax of the defined, embodied spirit is that of symbols.*¹²

As has been said, the attitude of ethnography towards the symbol has been complicated from the very beginning. On the one hand, ethnography as a science emulated and realised this general model of science opposing the symbol, while on the other hand, owing to the object and scope of its interest, it not only documented but also adapted for one-sidedly oriented European civilisation the world of mythical thought and imagination, the "products of the primeval mind", the language of the myth and the symbol. It rediscovered them, with time increasingly consciously and thoroughly, identifying their cognitive value, diversity, and depth. In order to demonstrate more clearly this complex attitude of ethnography towards the symbol I would like to resort to a comparison of two extensive quotations. The first is taken from a classical ethnographic work and the second comes from *Treatise on the History of Religions* by Mircea Eliade. By means of this contrast I would like to show how close the author of a classical ethnographic text is to Eliade's description and comprehension of the symbol, and how many years prior to Eliade he described that, which the author of *Treatise* called "hierophany". Then I shall return to the first quotation revealing the author-ethnographer and a further sequence of his arguments in order to demonstrate how in accordance with the accepted scientific convention these opinions turn against the symbol and how the convention accepted by the ethnographer led him towards a profound con-

tradition between the truth contained in the material and his interpretation.

Ethnographer:

As we already partially know, not only the features (e.g. hardness, sharpness...) but even the functions (...) of certain objects (...) are comprehended by the primitive and unenlightened mind in such a way as if they comprised - speaking in our language - something akin to condensed matter or energy embedded in those objects or even tantamount to them. Consequently, each such object can be and is interpreted by the uncivilised mind from two or even several sides. A stone or a piece of metal are, i.a. an ordinary stone or piece of metal, but apart from that they can be also something that we may describe as condensed might, hardness, resilience; a thorn is a thorn, but apart from that it can be condensed sharpness or the function of piercing; a lock is undoubtedly a lock, but it is also a condensed function of closing; an egg is, i.a. condensed life in statu nascendi, and a double nut or an ear of grain, etc. is, i.a. a condensed gain, i.e. potential, fruitfulness (and thus also happiness). And so on.

M. Eliade:

By way of example, whenever the "cult of stones" is mentioned not all stones are regarded as holy. We always encounter only certain stones worshipped due to their shape, size or ritual affiliations. The heart of the matter is not the cult of stones, but the fact that those stones were worshipped as long as they were not ordinary stones, but hierophanies and thus something more than commonplace "objects". (...) A certain object becomes sacral as long as it embodies (i.e. reveals) something else, something different. At this stage, it is meaningless whether this "difference" should be ascribed to an original shape, effectiveness, or simply "might", or whether it originates from the participation of that object in some sort of symbolism or is the outcome of a consecration rite or the voluntary or imposed situating of the object in a sphere suffused with sanctity (a holiday, holy time, some sort of an "event": lightning..., etc.).¹³

Let us return to the first quotation borrowed (as could be surmised right away) from Kazimierz Moszyński's *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* (The Folk Culture of the Slavs), since he is also the author of this fragment, so close and affiliated to the spirit of the text by M. Eliade ... and we shall see how many surprising and contradictory conclusions can be drawn. I intentionally repeat parts of a fragment already familiar to us, so as to faithfully render this link with the next paragraph containing conclusions in order to faithfully render the whole drama of the contradiction contained therein.

...A stone or a piece of metal are, i.a. an ordinary stone or a piece of metal, but apart from that they can be also something that we may describe as condensed might, hardness, resilience; (...) an egg is, i.a. condensed life in statu nascendi, and a double nut or an ear of grain, etc. are, i.a. a condensed gain, i.e. potential, fruitfulness (and thus also

happiness). And so on. Absolutely undisputed and simultaneously innumerable examples of similar concepts are preserved among all the unenlightened peoples on Earth. One of the most vivid mistakes in ethnology is to dispose of the discussed products of the primitive mind by using the term: *s y m b o l*; I do not know in ethnology a more naive view than the one claiming that, in its day, in folk magic a double ear of grain played the role of a fertility symbol, and an egg - that of a symbol of life, etc.¹⁴

It does not suffice to merely quote yet another example of the opposition of science *vis a vis* the symbol, which at times assumes outright the shape of an anti-symbolic manifesto. I try to delve into the intentions of such astonishingly contradictory conclusions. What do they conceal? What forbids Moszyński to recognise the symbolic dimensions he had just described as symbols? First and foremost, we are dealing here with a certain already anachronistic understanding of the symbol. Defending ethnography against the symbol Moszyński presumably secured it against the looming danger of excessive poetisation, an invasion of superfluous literariness, and a flood of aestheticisation. Moszyński warned against the temptation of treating those beliefs or, as he put it, those “products of the primitive mind” as metaphors, and against the application in relation to them of some sort of allegorical interpretations. Remember that the author of *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* wrote the book, or rather those parts relating to spiritual culture, at a time of ever strong and increasingly lively disputes about the symbolic or “imaginary” nature of the construction of *Wesele* (Wedding) by Stanisław Wyspiański, when assorted symbolic interpretations of the spectacle tended to multiply, and when a publication of the unequalled study by Stanisław Pigon: *Goście z zaświata na Wesele* (The Guests from the Other World at Wedding), which contains a reference to ethnography and the world of folk culture, was still far off.¹⁵ Finally, in his capacity as an active poet¹⁶ the author of *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* must have been familiar with the most varied fate and adventures of symbolism in poetry, including the extreme degeneration attained by symbolism in Russian poetry (if only in the works of A. Bely, a theoretician of this movement and the author of *Simvolizm*, 1910).

One may thus suspect and deduce that whenever Moszyński used the word “symbol” he treated it as a synonym of a poetical metaphor and even allegory. At any rate, from this viewpoint the symbol appears to be not something embedded in an ethnographic concrete, abstract, arbitrary, and dependent exclusively on man, creator or interpreter of the symbol and arbitrarily evoked by him. In this approach the symbol seems to be predominantly something distant from the world of primitive culture, something literary and devised, as if exclusively reserved for sophisticated or

overly refined intellectual creativity. In other words, Moszyński’s enmity towards the term: “symbol”, his postulated turn towards empiric research and description of those concepts and “psychic products”, so characteristic for all unenlightened peoples and the world of folk culture whose examples he had just described, could resemble identical hostility and be modelled on the critical attitude towards symbolism that appeared in the poetry and aesthetics of *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, among representatives of Acmeism or the sort we encounter in the case of Osip Mandelstam, returning to classical sources of the comprehension of the symbol and describing literary and poetical symbolism outright as faux-symbolism.¹⁷ Quite possibly, this resentment towards the symbol in the case of Moszyński, with a simultaneous postulate of a factual description of the matter of those primary concepts, could have the same source and in praxis is caused not so much by animosity towards the symbol in general as by enmity towards interpretations posing a threat to ethnology. However deep we would delve into the intentions of the author of *Kultura ludowa Słowian* or explain his aversion towards the term: “symbol”, facts remain facts. Despite the fact that in his introductory reflections about spiritual culture¹⁸ Moszyński with great caution and numerous reservations accepted the premise that it is impossible to speak about progress in religion and art (at least in the meaning of progress mentioned in the preceding volume, in reference to material culture), the cited fragment, whenever there is mention of the symbol, and the whole *opus* reveal a distinct division into the world of primeval man, an unenlightened and primitive mind, and the world of man of the culture of writing and developed civilisation, a world to which the contemporary researcher belongs. Between those two worlds there yawns a chasm. Naturally, it would be superfluous to recall that in this conception the former world is devoid of symbolic thinking and the symbol of the sort that may appear in the latter world. In an even more vivid presentation of this question, and posing a possibly caricature question: *Can a peasant (a person living in the primeval world) think symbolically?*, Moszyński proposed both in this fragment and in many others an unambiguous answer: *He cannot. Nothing resembling a symbol exists in the primitive mind.*

Several verses after the cited fragment rejecting the possibility of symbolic interpretations in ethnography Moszyński disclosed the chasm separating the world of primitive, primal man and that of civilised, contemporary man:

It is impossible to precisely describe the essence of the psychic creatures with which we become acquainted at this moment. Their completely elementary and spontaneous simplicity cannot be embraced in our concise concepts. At any rate, they do not belong to a world ruled by clear-cut views and sober thoughts but to a totally

*different world, whose roots, trunks, and branches are embedded in the subconscious while we see only their tops.*¹⁹

This time, in the light of the above-cited words, the “symbol”, rejected a short while ago, deprived of the right to exist in the world of primeval man, and feasible only in the world of high culture and sophisticated activity pursued by the intellect, appears to be a synonym if not of a precise, lucid, and unambiguous concept then certainly of one that is endowed with concise contents and thoughts. Upon numerous occasions Moszyński, describing those products of the primitive mind, so different and distant from the world of the researcher, drew attention to the characteristic absence of conceptual distinctness, the variability and fluidity of their contents, the numerous cases of an absence of consistency in ascribing those products of the primitive mind to a great variety of often contradictory meanings in accompanying folk interpretations.

Summing up: the symbol as understood by Moszyński seems to be, on the one hand, abstract, unreal, distant, and detached from the concrete and, on the other hand, approaching the unambiguity characteristic for intellectual concepts. In both cases, the symbol remains somewhat intellectual. It does not appear in the reality of the culture of the primeval man, or at least not in this role or in the same manner as in the culture of man belonging to a developed civilisation. Elsewhere, the symbol in Moszyński’s work occurs as a synonym of the sign or in reflections concerning embellishment.

I devoted so much attention and place to Moszyński’s deliberations not only to indicate the source of the deep contradiction between what he obtained in material descriptions of folk magic-religious beliefs and the conclusions he drew in his book, and not merely to show how certain *a priori* accepted historical conditions and a limited comprehension of the symbol made it impossible for him to use the term “symbol” in reference to those beliefs and phenomena belonging to the spiritual heritage of folk culture. I recalled his thoughts also because Moszyński’s comprehension of the symbol, despite the fact that I described it as anachronistic, has left a distinct imprint upon the attitude of ethnography towards the symbol and is continued up to this day in various statements. Despite the multifaceted development of contemporary research into the myth and the symbol it is still possible to observe in ethnography a dislike and reservation towards the symbol and symbolic interpretations. The symbol and symbolism continue to be treated as something unreal, abstract, arbitrary, and distant from the world of “authentic” folk culture. The fundamental premise assumed by Moszyński and discernible in his comprehension of the symbol mentioning the basic difference between the world of the primeval,

“primitive” man and that of contemporary man (the world of the researcher), is still preserved, although in a slightly altered form. This modification consists of a certain shift. In the case of Moszyński the symbol exists only and exclusively in a world of high culture or within the range of complicated contemporary culture, and is absent in folk culture. Such division reflects the conception launched by Levy-Bruhl and his partition into the world of the primitive, infantile man at the stage of pre-logical thought and the world of civilised man. For the present-day researcher, and in particular for the empirically oriented ethnographer for whom ethnography starts and ends in its research domains (provided, depending on the given village, region or theme, with a suitable footnote referring to nineteenth-century collections of ethnographic material, “Lud”, Kolberg, Fischer, etc.), and often for the scholar representing other disciplines dealing with the culture of contemporary man, the symbol in its ethnological dimension, assuming that it actually existed, took place only in the folk culture of yore (straight out of Moszyński or Kolberg) or the culture of the archaic man of the past, and today is no longer. According to Moszyński the symbol in folk culture has not yet come into being, assumed shape or appeared; numerous researchers dealing with contemporaneity claim that the symbol *a l r e a d y* does not exist. Following the example of Moszyński, solutions and answers to the question whether the peasant (or contemporary man) is capable of thinking symbolically are still sought in empirical field research with a foreseeable outcome, because if the word “symbol” is not mentioned in the “authentic” statement and interpretation (and this is rather the case) then this means that it is absent. This is the way in which the chasm between archaic and contemporary man, the peasant of the past and his present-day counterpart is retained. The whole strategy of such contemporary empirical investigations, based solely on convictions (beliefs, opinions) obtained in an interview and expressed explicitly, often loses that dimension of symbolic legacy and compels to treat it, often *a priori*, as a moribund Skansen, and is ready only to capture that, which is different, original, and individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that from this perspective the symbol and symbolic interpretations – as in the case of Moszyński — still appear to be something given, abstract, unreal, and literary. More, this lifeless Skansen is treated as thoroughly examined. The symbol is still – as it was for Moszyński (from the perspective of “empirical”, anecdotic ethnography that does not transcend the world of the village of N. and informer X) - something provided *a priori* by the interpreter.

This is why the greatest accomplishment of Mircea Eliade is, in my opinion, the fact that his studies abolish the division between primitive and civilised man,

artificially intensified by science, without obliterating the differences between them and indicating that symbolic thinking is both the domain of “primitive, primeval man”, a psychopath, a child, a poet, a member of a village community, a representative of the civilisation of the town, archaic man, and the ultimate contemporary man: *It is consubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason. The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality—the deepest aspects - that defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being. Consequently, the study of them enables us to reach a better understanding of man - of man as he is ...*”²⁰

As we saw, upon the level of empirical material description Eliade’s reflections concur with those of Moszyński. Nonetheless, in the case of Eliade the comprehension of the symbol is quite different. In contrast to Moszyński’s version, the symbol is not unreal or abstract and is always enrooted in the concrete. One could describe the work of Eliade and his understanding of the symbol by resorting to words of Boris Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago: *The idea that underlies this is that communion between mortals is immortal, and that the whole of life is symbolic because it is meaningful.*²¹ Symbolic, hierophanic reality is a reality “*par excellence* existent” (strong, effective) just as in the case of the hierophany of the rock (in the way it appears in folk beliefs). The symbol is not a synonym of unambiguity. Eliade used the concept of the symbol in a loose, unfettered, and frequently collateral manner with the concept of the image and the myth. Etymologically speaking, imagination/*imaginatio* is connected with the word: *imago*, image, emulation, and the word: *imitare* with: to emulate, to recreate. The imagination, *imaginatio* imitates models-images, recreates them, renders them topical, and repeats them endlessly. To be imaginative means to see the world as a whole, since the power and task of images consist of showing all that evades conceptualisation.²² That, which deserved to be stressed in the first place is the polysemantic and multi-strata nature of the symbol: the true image is, therefore, a set of meanings and not one of its numerous references.²³

Such an approach to the symbol was further developed by Paul Ricoeur in one of the chapters of his hermeneutics relating to this essential feature of the symbol: the symbol provides food for thought, he wrote, adding that he would interpret the symbol in the most radical sense, in the spirit of Eliade, who regarded symbols as analogous, spontaneously shaped and given meanings. This is the case of the meaning of water as a threat, when mention is made of a flood, or as purification, when mention is made of baptism.²⁴

Ricoeur thus expanded reflection about the multi-strata nature of the symbol elsewhere, when he dis-

cussed the *sui generis* ambiguous structure of the symbol (in the strict meaning of the word: “ambiguous”); this structure does not possess a single meaning but presents a bundle of assorted meanings.²⁵

Such a cluster of meanings entails references of one meaning to another and calls for interpretation (...); regardless what word we use to express it, this task is imposed by the very nature of the symbol, which is a tangle of meaning of sorts, composed of meanings enclosed within each other...²⁶

In *Existence and Hermeneutics* Ricoeur described four fundamental figures of comprehending the symbol *via* a symbol.²⁷ The first consists of extracting and comparing numerous values of the same symbol. The second figure of comprehension entails understanding a given symbol *via* another symbol and will thus encompass an increasingly large range of remaining symbols demonstrating an affiliation with the given symbol (water, stone, etc.). In the third figure, the given symbol will be comprehended *via* some sort of ritual and myths, and thus *via* other symptoms of the *sacrum*. Moreover, it is possible to demonstrate - and this is the fourth figure of comprehension - how in the same symbol numerous spheres of experience undergo a process of merging. This perspective shows how the symbol integrates assorted levels - cosmic, theological, anthropological, existential - binding all the levels, but not melting it into a single unity. Such an understanding of the symbol and such deciphering of symbolic meanings refer to a type of hermeneutics known under various names: “amplifying hermeneutics” (from the Latin: *amplificare*), which expands the symbol, allowing itself to be lifted by the force of its integration,²⁸ the hermeneutics of a “return to sources” (Eliade), “a return to things”, “the hermeneutics of listening”²⁹ (Heidegger), and “the hermeneutics of reconstruction” (Gerardus van der Leeuw). Gilbert Durand, a French researcher dealing with symbolic imagination, encompassed this current within a single name by including, alongside the above-mentioned authors, also the works of Bachelard, and proposed: “the hermeneutics of remythization”; remythization means the concentration of meaning gathered in the manner of grapes during a grape harvest (...).³⁰ Here, Durand referred directly to yet another definition of the sort of hermeneutics that we find in the works of Ricoeur, who described this type of approach as: “the hermeneutics of recollection”; according to the most expressive meaning of the word “recollection” means both: to recollect oneself, reminisce, as well as: to deliberate, to gather, in the meaning used by Heidegger telling us that *legen* - speech is also: *legen* - gathering, as in: *lese* in *Weinlese*, the grape harvest.³¹

Works by Mircea Eliade still constitute a challenge for ethnography and for embarking upon such recollec-

tions. Today, in view of the development of numerous studies on the myth and the symbol, conducted from different points of view— structuralistic, semiotic, and phenomenological³², as well as in assorted domains, such as humanistic folkloristic³³, in the wake of studies making the effort of reinterpreting the material, ethnography cannot be protected by hiding its head in empirical sand. “Empirical” ethnography is compelled to acknowledge that there also exist the empiricism of the symbol.

***Bibliographic note:** This is a slightly altered and brought up to date version of an article opening an issue of “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” on the symbol, prepared as an *homage* for the *oeuvre* of Mircea Eliade [cf. “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” no. 3/1988].

Endnotes

- 1 M. Czerwiński, *Symbol dzisiaj*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1987, no.1-4, p. 100.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid. p. 104.
- 4 *Słownik etnologiczny, terminy ogólne*, ed. Zofia Staszczak, Warszawa, Poznań 1987.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
- 6 Ibid., p. 386.
- 7 P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, selected, prep. and afterword Stanisław Cichowicz, Warszawa 1975, p. 11.
- 8 S. S. Avierintsev, *Simvol*, in: *Kratkaya literaturnaya entsiklopediya*, Moscow 1971, vol. 7, p. 826; Polish translation in: “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 3/1988, pp. 149-150.
- 9 Quoted after: Gerd Heinz Mohr, *Lexikon der Symbole, Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1972, p. 2.
- 10 Yuri Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, transl. Bogusław Żyłko, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 3/1988, p. 151, based on the original text: Y. Lotman, *Simvol v sistiemie kulturi*, in: *Trudy po znakovim sistemam*, vol. 21, 1987, pp. 10-21.
- 11 Quoted after: Gerd Heinz Mohr, *Lexikon der Symbole, Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1972, p. 2.
- 12 R. R. Niebhur, “Harvard Divinity Bulletin”, October-November 1989, p. 3.
- 13 M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, transl. Jan Wierusz-Kowalski, Warszawa 1966, p. 19.
- 14 K. Moszyński, *Kultura Ludowa Słowian*, Warszawa 1967, vol. 2, part 1, p. 316.
- 15 Stanisław Pigoń, *Goście z zaświata na Weselu*, in: idem, *Poprzedz stulecia. Studia z dziejów literatury i kultury*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 442-478.
- 16 Apart from writing poetry Moszyński also studied at the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts in the studio of Józef Mehoffer; cf. Wiktor Stoczkowski, *Uczony – postać faustyczna*, in: *Szkice i próby etnologiczne*, “Studenckie Zeszyty Naukowe UJ”, Kraków 1985; cf. also. XY, *Życiorys II*, “Nauka Polska”, vol. 9, 1928.
- 17 Cf. S. S. Avierintsev, op. cit., p. 830; cf. Osip Mandelstam, *Słowo i kultura*, Warszawa 1972.
- 18 K. Moszyński, op. cit., p. 15.

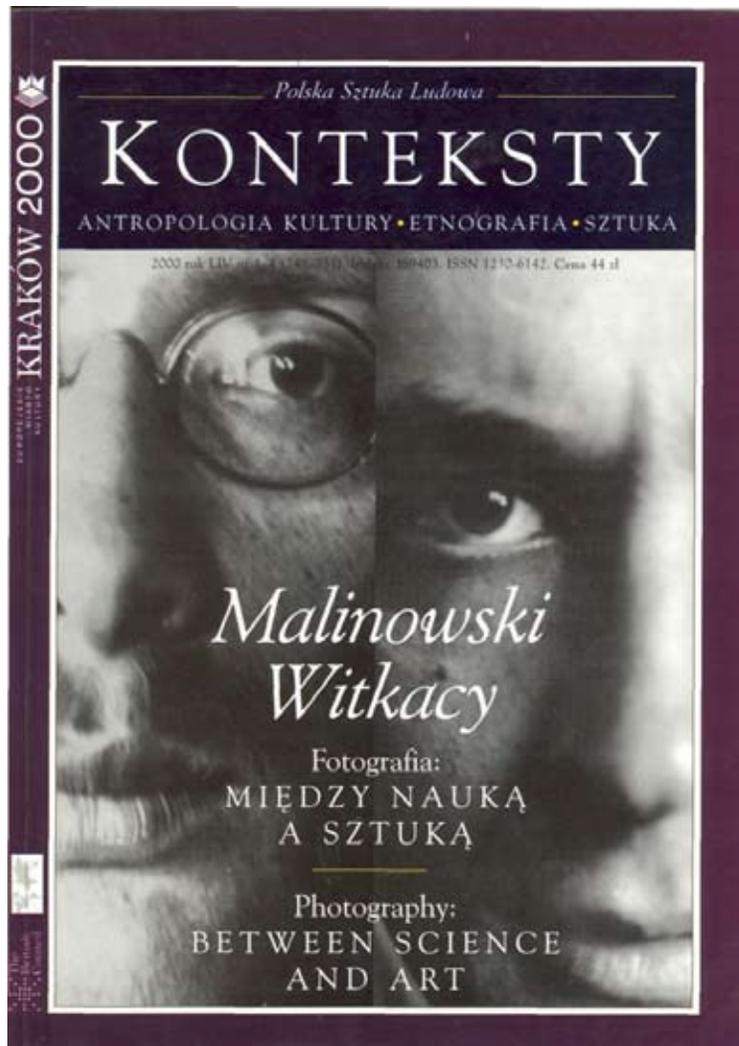
- 19 Ibid., p. 317.
- 20 M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 33.
- 21 B. Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Paris 1976, p. 44.
- 22 M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 41.
- 23 Ibid., p. 36.
- 24 P. Ricoeur, *Symbol daje do myślenia*, in: *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, op. cit., Warszawa 1975, p. 14.
- 25 Ibid., p. 78.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 This is the sort of hermeneutics, which opposes the “hermeneutics of destruction”, as P. Ricoeur described it (op. cit., pp. 77-94; 80). Fundamental division into two types of hermeneutics was mentioned also by Gilbert Durand: generally speaking, there are two types of hermeneutics, the one that reduces the symbol to something that is (...) only the outcome (...), the symptom, and that which, on the contrary, expands the symbol, making it possible for the power of integration to rise in order to gain access to a certain type of experienced “supra-consciousness”. Cf. G. Durand, *Wyobrażenia symboliczne*, Warszawa 1986, p. 118.
- 29 P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 81.
- 30 G. Durand, op. cit., p. 119.
- 31 P. Ricoeur, op. cit., p. 80.
- 32 On structural, semiotic, and phenomenological currents in studies on the myth and the symbol as well as their significance for contemporary Polish ethnography see: *Antropologia kultury w Polsce – dziedzictwo, pojęcia, inspiracje*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, no. 1, 2 /1980; no. 1/1981; here also an extensive biography of M. Eliade and his works together with a bibliography. In Polish ethnography I have in mind works that embarked upon the effort of such a reinterpretation of ethnographic sources and material, often referring to studies by M. Eliade: Joanna i Ryszard Tomicczy, *Drzewo życia*, Warszawa 1976; and the structuralistic works by Ludwik Stomma, *Słońce rodzi się 13 grudnia*, Warszawa 1981; idem, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej XIX w.*, Warszawa 1980; second edition containing selected essays, Łódź 2002; Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski, *Podróż do piekieł*, Warszawa 1979; idem, *Symbolika ruchu obrotowego i rytualnej inwersji*, Warszawa 1978, “Etnografia Polska”, vol. XXII, fasc. 1; idem, *Tabu a paradygmaty etnologii*, Warszawa 1989. At this stage it is difficult not to express astonishment that L. Stomma’s *Magia Alkmeny* (issued in different publications, cf., i.a. *Słońce rodzi się 13 grudnia*, op. cit., pp. 24-45) - one of the breakthrough works in Polish ethnography as regards interpretations not only of the symbolic of bonds but also a presentation of the function of the myth, integrating assorted domains of human experiences, as well as methodological consequences and the importance of his study for an interpretation of folk tradition relating to beliefs about time, space, folk demonology, etc. - has been totally ignored in the above-cited *Słownik terminów etnologicznych* (cf. op. cit., 1987); these works by Stomma are not mentioned in bibliographies under: *Magic*, or in the general bibliography. On references to publications and reflections by M. Eliade and the application of “the hermeneutics of recollections” in an interpretation of the symbolic structure of beliefs and folk tradition cf. also later works: Danuta Benedyktowicz, Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, Encyklopedia Kultury Polskiej XX wieku, Studia i materia-

ly, Wrocław 1992. On the symbol in ethnography: Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, *Stereotyp-obraz-symbol- o możliwościach nowego spojrzenia na stereotyp*, in: *Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Etnograficzne*, fasc. 24, 1988, pp. 7-35 and idem, *Portrety 'obcego'. Od stereotypu do symbolu*, Kraków 2000. See also: Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, Danuta Benedyktowicz, *The Home - the Way of Being. The Home in Folk Tradition*, Częstochowa, 2009

³³ Works by Jerzy Bartmiński are fundamentally important for the interpretation of the symbol in ethnography. Cf. *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, conception and ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, vice-editor Stanisława Niebrzegowska, vol. 1. *Cosmos*, [part] 1, *Niebo. Światła niebieskie. Ogień. Kamienie*, Lublin: Wydaw. UMCS 1996, 439 pp., part 2. *Ziemia. Woda. Podziemie*, Lublin: Wydaw. UMCS 1999, 481 pp.

The authors invariably retained the specific methodology of the description of the entry devised for *Słownik...*, which reviewers regarded as an original and successful solution. This fact was stressed after the publication of fasc. 1 of *Słownik...* by Władysław Kupiszewski, Anna Tatarkiewicz, Marian Pilot, Jacek Banaszkiewicz, and Roch Sulima in a discussion published in: "Regiony" 1997, no. 3, pp. 2-11; Czesław Hernas, Krzysztof Wrocławski, Anna Dąbrowska, Jan Miodek, Jolanta Ługowska, Roch Sulima, Iwona Smolka, and Piotr Matywiecki in a discussion published in: "Literatura Ludowa" 1998, no. 6, pp. 51-71; Barbara Boniecka in:

"*Twórczość Ludowa*" 1997, no. 4, pp. 43-45; positive assessments were formulated by foreign researchers: Svetlana M. Tolstaya (in: "Zhivaja Starina", Moskva 1997, no. 4, pp. 52-53), Alexei Yudin ("Slavynovedeniye" 1998, no. 5, pp. 98-100 and "Narodoznavchi Zoshiti" 1997, no. 6, pp. 400-403) and Kasanovič Bogdan ("Slavistika" IV, Belgrade 2000, pp. 277-278). According to Jerzy Bartmiński: *It is based on a conception of "cognitive definition" built of stereotype motifs arranged into uniform and semantically cohesive sets resolving questions about the place of the given entry (object) in the system of inner relations (collections, oppositions), its appearance, origin, application, etc. The principle of building entries in the Lublin Słownik is the division of explication and documentation; in the latter, contexts are grouped according to genres that can be discovered also in traditional folklore. The purpose of thus created entries is the reconstruction of particular fragments of the folk image of the world seen by a carrier of traditional folk culture. Work on Słownik... is being continued; starting with issue no.1. 2007, the quarterly "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa", published at the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Art, proposes successively selected entries prepared for consecutive volumes of Słownik... (cf. Jerzy Bartmiński, *Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*; Dorota Piekarczyk, Joanna Szadura, [entry] *Chaber*; as well as Czesław Robotycki, *Przeciwko Kopalnińskiemu w stronę Bartmińskiego – o Słowniku stereotypów i symboli ludowych*, "Konteksty Polska Sztuka Ludowa" no. 1/2007).*



The Alcmene Myth¹

A number of complicated intrigues and contests involving the Olympian deities preceded – as Hesiod, Homer, Apollodoros, Theocritus, Pindar, Diodorus and John Tzetzes harmoniously wrote – the birth of Hercules, the out of wedlock son of Zeus and Alcmene (the wife of Amphitryon), a representative of the human race. The whole issue was sensitive if only due to the ambiguous, at the very least, situation of Hera, the rightful wife of Zeus, and thus called for considerable tact. Zeus, on the other hand, has never been known for excessive subtlety. When the time of birth was nearing he started to loudly boast of his fatherhood and promised that the prince to be born in the family of Perseus before twilight would become a great king. This was exactly what Hera had been waiting for.

*Hera went at once to Mycenae, where she hastened the pangs of Nicippe, wife of Sthenelus. She then hurried to Thebes and squatted cross-legged at Alcmene's door with her clothing tied into knots and her fingers locked together; by which means she delayed the birth of Heracles until Eurystheus, son of Sthenelus, a seven-months child, already lay in his cradle.*²

*According to others,³ it was Eileithyia, who hindered the travails on Hera's behalf, and a faithful handmaiden of Alcmene's, a yellow-haired Galanthis, or Galen, who left the birth chamber to announce untruly that Alcmene had been delivered. When Eileithyia sprang up in surprise, unclasping her fingers and uncrossing her knees, Heracles was born and Galanthis laughed at the successful deception.*⁴

One way or another, the birth of Hercules was sufficiently delayed for him to lose primacy for the sake of Eurystheus, born before nightfall, for whom he was also later compelled to perform his famous labours. Magic spells cast by jealous Hera proved effective. Let us, therefore, subject them to a more through analysis.

The cited myth contains two types of operations: 1) the tying of knots and crossing of fingers and legs

in order to prevent (halt) birth; 2) the uncrossing of fingers and legs to cause (start) birth.

These operations are evidently identical with the magic tricks applied during childbirth in Polish lands. By way of example, provoking or accelerating labour involved stretching hands,⁵ unfurling fingers,⁶ opening doors,⁷ windows,⁸ chests,⁹ and drawers,¹⁰ and even dispatching messengers to a priest so that he may open the pyx with the consecrated host¹¹ or – in Russian Orthodox Church terrains – the imperial gates,¹² and praying to God to open the heavens and hell, even if for a short while.¹³ All possible knots are untied,¹⁴ holes are made in walls and the roof,¹⁵ rings and wedding bands are removed from the fingers of the woman in labour¹⁶ whose hair is unbraided,¹⁷ and local fences are toppled and destroyed.¹⁸ The entire duration of childbirth is also the time of a ban on sewing and spinning.¹⁹ If someone were to maliciously wish to halt labour he would have to perform the reverse of the above-mentioned operations, and the most frequently encountered procedures are those applied by Hera: the crossing of fingers and legs,²⁰ the knotting of clothes²¹ or (as in the case of Polish Jews) the closing of drawers.²²

Activity from the range of Alcmene's magic	Operations (+)	Operations (–)
To cause labour (opening)	106	–
To halt labour	–	12
Prior to baptism and purification	3	–
Prior to a wedding ²⁶	59	–
After a wedding ²⁷	1 ²⁸	109
To render a wedding impossible ²⁹	1 ³⁰	18
To accelerate death (shorten agony)	37	–
To render death impossible	–	47
After death	20	24
Total	227 ³¹	212 ³²

The purpose of undertaking particular operations, which (together with their derivative forms) we shall call in further parts of this article Alcmene's magic,²³ is sufficiently distinctive to permit an easy, individual interpretation consisting of associating magical activities with the physiological process of labour.²⁴ The situation grows complicated, however, when we notice that Alcmene's magic universally accompanies²⁵ also other rites of the family cycle; the conventional designation of opening and tying, the prohibition of sewing and spinning, the making of holes, the taking off of rings and wedding bands, etc. – operations (+), and the reverse marked as (-) and presented in the table below as follows:

If we were to eliminate for a while from our reflections assorted malicious practices (*bewitching* – as W. Abraham described them in contrast to ordinary magic operations) and those intended to counter the natural order of things concurrent with the ritual cycle (such as rendering death impossible), we would gain a consistent chain of sequences:

Alcmene's magic operations (+) birth.

Alcmene's magic operations (-) ... (+), purification and baptism . (-) ... (+) nuptials (-) ... (+) death (+) i (-).

Each family ritual³³ is thus preceded by a positive aspect of Alcmene's magic, and the completed ritual –

by negative magic. In an analogy to easily legible birth practices one would be tempted to say that at the beginning family rituals are caused (opened) and at the end – rendered impossible (closed). We may capture the meaning of such activities only after accepting the Van Gennep theory of *rites de passage*.³⁴ Human life is composed, according to this interpretation, of a comprehension of time in folk cultures, a chain of assorted states (*l'état*). In order to alter state *x* (e.g. that of a single person) – which takes place through the intermediary of the ritual – into state *y* (e.g. marital) it is first necessary to leave initial state *x* (connected with a whole magic-ritual procedure) and then subject oneself to the complete complex of the ritual period of transition³⁵ so as to be finally magically enclosed within new state *y*. In this situation, Alcmene's magic, by referring not to rituals as a separate object but to people subjected to its operations, would have to aim at (+) opening, causing an exit from the initial state, and (-) – in the new state of retention. Such an interpretation, concurrent with the third condition of the Lévi-Straus construction of a model, presents all the observed facts (see: table above).

The Van Gennep theory encompasses not only the ritual nature of the family, but also the whole cycle. While accepting the explanation of using Alcmene's magic based on the framework of this theory we should consistently draw attention to the rites of passage of

Holiday (rite de passage) ⁴¹	Actions (+)	Actions (-)
St. Dmitriy 11 November ⁴²	6	6
St. Lucia 12 December	27	10
Christmas Eve 24 December	28	59
New Year's Eve (31 December) 1 January	3	9
Our Lady of Candles 2 February	11	-
Shrovetide	14	4
Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary 25 March	4	2
Easter	30	39
St. George 23 April ⁴³	8	7
Whitsuntide	4	1
St. Vit 15 June	2	1
Eve of St. Jonh the Baptist 23 June	7	14
Sts. Peter and Paul (Petropavel) 29 June	5	5
Transfiguration of the Lord 5 August	8	15
St. Michael (?) ca. 24-29 September ⁴⁴	3	2
Total	160	174

the annual cycle³⁶ and the accompanying magic practices (or rather those that comprise the basic core of folk culture). Here, the magic of Alcmene occurs in the same forms as in the family cycle³⁷ but in their different statistical intensification. In this manner, while in the family cycle the most frequent were the opening and shutting of windows, doors, and drawers, the crossing of fingers, the making of knots, or the combing of hair or placing a headband, here pride of place is given to the prohibition or, alternatively, injunction concerning sewing and spinning,³⁸ the use of chains to bind tables and other objects, the tying up of scissors,³⁹ and the tying up, and walking around⁴⁰, of people, animals, plants, household items or sacral items, the making or filling of holes, etc. The most distinctive symptoms of Alcmene's magic are to be discovered on the following holidays:

This is by no means the end. The Van Gennep conception of the "state" (despite the fact that the author had not steered his reasoning in this direction) cannot be limited only to the sphere of rituals. All definition-oriented conditions for the "state"⁴⁵ are met also by such life situations as illness and, alternatively, the state of being healthy, the state of good fortune and natural calamity, etc. They too are accompanied by typical symptoms of Alcmene's magic. Thus we come across the latter (operations +) among activities intent on ending an illness - 42 cases, increasing the growth of grain - 21 cases, and making it possible to build a house, a bridge, or a road - 17 cases. In turn, Alcmene's magic (-) takes place in preventive anti-sickness practices (the retention of the state of being healthy) - 44, malicious magic intent on making it impossible for the ill to get well (the retention of an illness) - 26. It (-) is also applied for preserving the security and prosperity of a home, a family or property - 82, protection against contacts with demons and spirits - 54 cases,⁴⁶ etc. The latter example, proposed by Alcmene's magic (+) and employed to evoke demons - 20 cases⁴⁷ or establishing contact with God

- 26 cases,⁴⁸ is of special interest to us. What sort of a change occurs in those instances?

In the case of the God-man relations the issue at stake, while referring to the foundations of Slavonic folk cosmogony, seems to be fairly uncomplicated. God and man remain upon different cosmic levels, distinctly separated. Regardless of the copious number of conceptions and attempts at formulating this distinctness⁴⁹ we may hazard declaring that it is sufficiently outlined in folk culture for us to be able to recognise the distinctness of the state of God (the state in which God finds Himself) and the earthly state (in which man finds himself). Since - as has been mentioned - the prime condition for any sort of change of the existing state is leaving the initial x it is not surprising that man's attempts at coming closer to the divine must be accompanied by Alcmene's magic (T). A reference to this comprehension and to the relation between people and demonic creatures encounters, however, considerable difficulties. All researchers dealing with Polish folk demonology⁵⁰ agree that Slavonic demons do not comprise (as Lelewel wanted) autonomous creatures, being mere posthumous embodiments of people of certain, specific categories; naturally, this could suggest an obliteration of differences between their state z and state v corresponding to particular phases of the family cycle.⁵¹ This situation would, in turn, exert a negative impact on the possibility and purposefulness of applying Alcmene's magic. In order to explain this lack of clarity it appears to be necessary to establish these "demon-creating" human categories. Who becomes a demon after death? Solutions to thus formulated questions are offered in the table⁵² presented below:

The enumerated detailed categories can be restricted with the least risk of logical invalidity to three more extensive ones: those that broke the principle of the succession of states (item 1 and 2 in the table),

those that carried out a change of the state without fulfilling the *rite de passage* obligatory (Alcmene's magic!) in this situation (item 3, 6-9). those that died in the state of passage (item 1, 2, 4, 5).

No.	"Demon-creating" category	no. of cases
1	Dead foetuses	30
2	Miscarried	47
3	Not baptised	79
4	Betrothed, died prior to wedding	12
5	Betrothed, died during wedding	35
6	Suicide victims	33
7	Hanged	29
8	Drowned	82
9	Victims of unnatural and violent death	35
	Total	392

Once again, those three categories can be summed up in a single, most general one: – those who (in a biological sense) departed and those who did not (in a magic-ritual sense) from state x , and those who entered (in a biological sense) and did not enter (in a magical-ritual sense) state.⁵³ In other words, after death only those become demons who (regardless whether unconsciously or not) broke out of the chain of the succession of states, thus situating themselves outside its constant links (or, from another point of view, several links simultaneously), i.e. in a permanent state of transition. This partly explains the fact to which attention should be drawn already at this stage, namely, that the formulas⁵⁴ describing the period of *temps de passage* and characterising the “demon-creative” state of people who are supposed to turn into demonic creatures are totally identical.

Now, leave this issue for a while and return to the question of the forms of Alcmene’s magic (comprehended in a totally descriptive-mechanical manner). They can be divided into two typical varieties:

A. Connected with opening and closing, and thus the opening and shutting of doors, windows, drawers, pyxes with the consecrated host, and imperial gates, the destruction of roofs, walls, and fences, the making and plugging up of holes, etc.

B. Connected with tying up and untying, and thus: assorted practices involving knots, fragments of fishing nets, the belting, wrapping or tying of people, animals, plants and objects, the encircling of a table with chains and ropes, a forehead - with a wreath, fingers - with rings, the placing of a cap, injunctions and prohibitions concerning sewing, spinning, etc.

This division, totally illegitimate and based on subjective and imprecise premises, does not possess any sort of essential significance and was performed in order to make it easier to demonstrate that it is possible to add to each of the distinguished categories A and B a number of similar forms of activity pursued at the same time and place, and thus semantically identical with the enumerated ones. One of them is the creation of the theme of a relatively copious ethnographic bibliography,⁵⁵ i.e. the so-called magic circle.⁵⁶

According to K. Moszyński: *The function of magic enclosure is fulfilled by a belt, a chain, a magic circle, a ring, a wreath, etc. [...] When, for instance, an inhabitant of the Polesie region travelling during the Pentecostal week across the local forests hears strange sounds announcing the proximity of water sprites* ⁵⁷ *he marks with an axe a circle around the cart wide enough so that the demon could not touch him. The women of Polesie walking in a forest or working on land located in distant woodlands act in the same way; instead of an axe they mark a circle on the ground with a knife [...]. I selected particularly vivid and typical examples; one could cite many less appealing ones.*⁵⁸

Let us add immediately that Moszyński listed as analogous to the creation of the magic circle also the custom of ploughing around villages and fields or their inclusion within a “metaphorical tangle”.⁵⁹ The magical circle in the form used by the peasants of Polesie appears to be, however, the simplest example, and thus the most useful for initial analysis.

What does the essence of the activity of Alcmene’s magic in this form consist of? By enclosing (symbolically girding) a certain space, the peasant from the Polesie region stops it at the initial (current) state x . At the time of drawing the circle this state of things prevails on both its sides. At the stage when the situation on the outside is subject to change (e.g. an attack launched by demonic creatures), the new, emergent state could not encompass the magically enclosed space⁶⁰ and thus harm the objects within it. Naturally, an obliteration of the circle or its part would immediately produce a diametrically different effect - such as the above-mentioned damaged fence or a hole made in a wall or a roof. In all those cases we are dealing with identical phenomena not only upon a semantic level (Alcmene’s magic) but also on an instrumental one. Just as the magic circle restricts arbitrary space dependent on the requirements of the person applying magic, so the walls, the threshold, and the roof or the windows are elements limiting the inner space of the home (wider: every building). Representatives of the same category will also consistently include fences or unploughed strips of land enclosing farmstead, village borders, cemetery walls, riverbanks, and roads⁶¹ as well as crossroads. All divide space and thus in suitable conditions⁶² also states, and all may comprise the subject of Alcmene’s magic. Are they, however, identical? To what category should we ascribe the space of a yet unploughed strip of land, the village border, or the threshold? Books by theoreticians of magic,⁶³ folk beliefs,⁶⁴ and even numerous legal formulae⁶⁵ concerning borders provide an unambiguous solution. Borders are extra-territorial, i.e. objects from this particular category belong to both divisible sequences of transformation (here: states x and y) and, at the same time, they do not belong to any of them. They can be described, therefore, only by the following the Hegelian sentence, incorrect from the viewpoint of formal logic:

$$A = (x -i- y) \text{ and } (-x + -y).$$

This sentence had already appeared to be indispensable upon two other occasions – for defining the essence (specificity in relation to the “normal” state) of periods of passage in annual and family cycles, and for characterising demonic (“demon-creating”) creatures. This is a concurrence of essential significance. If heretofore reasoning is correct and the essence of the three discussed phenomena situated at levels ostensibly remaining at a great distance, is identical,

then they must demonstrate a distinct connection, including exchangeability and mutual exponentiation. Take a closer look at the level of binary relations. Theoretically, there exists the possibility of a relation of the categories described in: $A = (x + y) i (-x + -y)$ and arranged in three pairs: a - demonological (“demon-creating”) creatures: spatial borders (thresholds, unploughed strips of land, fences, roads, etc.); b – demonic (“demon-creating”) creatures: periods of passage (as in the family, annual, and 24 hour cycle⁶⁶); c – spatial borders: periods of passage.

Each of those versions (a, b and c) corresponds to particular relations in the tables presented below:

As can be seen, in all three cases the existence of correlation gains a distinctive numerical confirmation. In this fashion, relation a⁶⁹ achieves in the case of burials of “demon-creating” creatures as much as 98,9% of co-dependence; those data are slightly lower in the case of relation b (correspondingly: 96,4% and 92.5%) and relation c. This would confirm distinctly the legitimacy of heretofore reasoning without, however, comprising its ultimate proof, i.e. an ascertainment of the at least relative identity of the analysed categories.

Let us start with the fact that each of the latter possesses the ability to attain exponentiation *via* an “intensification of features”. In other words, a drowned non-baptised person will be a more malicious (or rather, more powerful) demon Y than an ordinary victim of drowning or a non-baptised person who died of natural causes; the same holds true for a groom who hanged himself in the course of the wedding ceremonies, compared to an ordinary victim of suicide by hanging, etc. Similarly, in the case of spatial borders (Z) there are more demons at the crossroads than along an ordinary straight road, while plants growing next a fence have greater medicinal powers if this spot is the meeting place of two or more fences, etc. Such qualities become even more vivid during times (periods) of passage (V). Ferns bloom only at midnight before the feast day of St. John the Baptist, while wolfsbane assumes aphrodisiac properties at noon each day but its effectiveness is certain only at noon on Whitsuntide and (in the case of dried plants) on the day of St. Lucia. Such examples can be multiplied, although it must be accentuated right away that this sort of individual (single-category) exponentiation is relatively rare in Slavonic folk culture.

Relation a	village borders	unploughed land	fences	thresholds	roads	banks	others without features A ⁶⁷
Place of burial of demon-creating creatures	80	19	18	66	62	30	3
Place of appearance of demonic creatures	65	55	11	21	26	30	7
Place of establishing contacts with the devil	6	2	7	5	26	7	19
Place of witch sabbaths ⁶⁸	5	4	–	1	10	3	47
Total	156	80	36	93	124	70	76

Relation b	periods of passage in annual cycle	another not A ⁶⁹ in annual cycle	creatures in the state of passage	creatures in not the state A	periods of passages the daily cycle				total in the daily cycle in the periods of passage
					12	24	east	west	
Periods of appearance of demons	146	7	–	–	59	79	38	33	209
Periods of possible establishment of contacts with demons	20	1	26	4	3	13	5	7	28
Total	166	26	62	92	43	40	237		

Relation c (1)		transition periods in annual cycle	other times of annual cycle	transition periods of day cycle	other times of day, night
Ritual activities on village borders, unploughed land, roads, etc.	No	126	4	180	14
	%	96,9	3,1	92,7	7,4
Relation c (2)		pregnant women	young married people	cortege with the dead	others unconnected with transition period
Ban on staying on borders or crossing them		80	43	33	7

Magic folk prescriptions as a rule combine elements of all "Alcmene" categories (without, however, limiting themselves to them).⁷⁰ The "statistical"⁷¹ folk, paramedical "prescription" advising: "Take a thread from the noose of a hanged man, add $a\%$, a_2 , a_3 , and herb a_4 z picked at the crossing of unploughed strips of land at noon on St. George's day..." is thus based on, i.a. an interchangeable exponentiation of "Alcmene" and ergo can be written down as:

$$f = Y^n \times Z^n \times V^n \times a_1 \times a_2 \dots \times a_n$$

This formula ultimately confirms the legitimacy of our heretofore reflections (only identical categories can mutually exponentiate), and hence provokes their temporary completion.

I would like to emphasise temporary completion particularly strongly. The presented sketch is not only an open entity but without a continuation it outright loses its *raison d'être*. (I bypass the explanation of particular problems). The process of introducing order into findings neglected or rendered vulgar by the theoreticians of magic and Slavonic rites, and the demonstration of their close, integral union can become a point of departure for more correct studies on a whole range of aspects of Polish folk culture. In this respect, I would be inclined to consider the important message of this article to be as follows:

The recognition of the impossibility of a separable examination of questions linked with the comprehension of space and time in folk culture. Its structures, after all, develop in three parallel dimensions: temporal, spatial and theognostic-cosmic,⁷² if one can thus describe the Earth (man)–heaven (God) axis together with all its cosmosophic aspects. Sidestepping any of those levels not only impoverishes but, even more, remarkably falsifies the image of the products of folk spiritual culture, turning it into a flat and barren caricature.

Endnotes

¹ The bibliography used in this text has been verified rather extensively in the course of research conducted in the following voivodeships: Białystok, Chełmno,

Nowy Sącz, Przemyśl, Siedlce, Suwałki and Zamość. The collected material also made it possible to ascertain the existence of the majority of the forms of Alcmene's magic kept alive in Poland up to this day.

² R. Graves, *Mity greckie*, Warszawa 1974, p. 411.

³ Pausanias, Ovid, Aelian and Antoninus Liberalis.

⁴ Graves, op. cit., p. 412.

⁵ W. Łęgowski, *Zwyczaje i obyczaje. Styty pogrzebowe, obrzędy ślubne, chrzciny i inne zabawy ludowe, głównie pod względem na hygiene*, "Wędrowiec", 1899, fasc. 2, p. 487; J. Talko-Hryniewicz, *Zarysy lecznictwa ludowego na Rusi Południowej*, Kraków 1893, p. 77.

⁶ W. Łęgowski, *Zwyczaje i obyczaje. Styty pogrzebowe, obrzędy ślubne, chrzciny i inne zabawy ludowe, głównie pod względem na hygiene*, "Wędrowiec", 1899, fasc. 2, p. 487; J. Talko-Hryniewicz, *Zarysy lecznictwa ludowego na Rusi Południowej*, Kraków 1893, p. 77.

⁷ K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian*, Warszawa 1967, vol. II, part 1, p. 292.

⁸ J. S. Bystroń, *Słowiańskie obrzędy rodzinne*, Kraków 1916, p. 20.

⁹ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, pp. 292-293; Bystroń, op. cit., p. 20, 27.

¹⁰ Bystroń, op. cit., p. 20, 28.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 20.

¹² S. Poniatowski, *Obrzędy rodzinne*, "Wiedza o Polsce", vol. 3, part: *Etnografia Polski*, Warszawa 1932, p. 328; Bystroń, op. cit., p. 20; Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 73.

¹³ Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 76.

¹⁴ J. Świętek, *Lud nadrabski od Gdowa po Bochnię*, Kraków 1893, p. 599; Bystroń, op. cit., p. 20; Frazer, op. cit., p. 216; Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, 292.

¹⁵ D. Lepkiy, *De yaki verovania pro detimu*, "Zorya", VII: 1886, p. 269.

¹⁶ Bystroń, op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁷ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 291.

¹⁸ N. Z., *Z Opatowa*, "Gazeta Radomska", 1888, no. 57, p. 3.

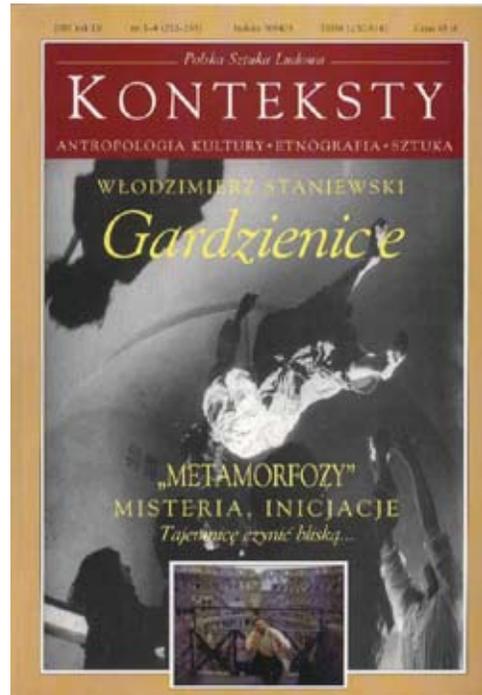
¹⁹ Bystroń, op. cit., p. 15, 35.

²⁰ L. Marcewicz, *O zabobonach i guslach przy narodzeniu dziecka*, Kraków 1876, p. 29; Frazer, op. cit., p. 217.

²¹ K. Wójcicki, *Klechy, starożytne podania i powieści ludu Polski i Rusi*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 220-221; Marcewicz, op. cit., p. 30; A. Fischer, *Zwyczaje pogrzebowe ludu polskiego*, Lwów 1921, p. 112; S. Ciszewski, *Żeńska twarz*, Kraków 1927, pp. 20-24.

- ²² Marcewicz, op. cit., p. 28.
- ²³ The symbolic name of the phenomenon (and not “the magic of knots”, e.g. as Witort described certain activities of this sort) is necessary to underline: 1) the fact that the same range of phenomena will include operations differentiated as regards their form), 2) such forms can have totally dissimilar meanings in various ritual contexts, i.e. not every knot is an element of Alcmene’s magic and not always will it be connected with the tying and untying of knots.
- ²⁴ An association universal in nineteenth-century ethnographic literature. See also: Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 75.
- ²⁵ All numerical data pertain to a representative sample of fifty selected publications. Importance is, therefore, attached not to the absolute value of the data but to the proportions between them.
- ²⁶ A typical example of the prenuptial magic performed by Alcmene (+) is the ceremony of *rozpleciny* (unbraiding). See: L. Stomma, *Analiza strukturalna słowiańskich obrzędów weselnych* (typescript at the disposal of the Chair of Ethnography at Warsaw University), Warszawa 1973, pp. 7-12.
- ²⁷ Typical activity – the *oczepiny* ceremony (covering the bride’s hair with a cap). Stomma, op. cit., pp. 23- 29.
- ²⁸ In accordance with the recommendations made by Lévi-Strauss I regard individual cases unconfirmed by comparisons as deviations and exclude them from my reflections.
- ²⁹ Here, a classical example is “tying up the potency” of the groom, encountered all across Poland, in order to render him unable to consummate the marriage. B. Baranowska, *Życie codzienne wsi między Wartą a Pilicą w XIX wieku*, Warszawa 1969, p. 100; F r a z e r, op. cit., pp. 217-218; Talko-Hryniewicz, op. cit., p. 203.
- ³⁰ See: note 27.
- ³¹ Apart from the above-mentioned, other relatively common forms include: untying horses, damaging the threshold, taking covers off pots, etc.
- ³² Additional mention is due to: tying a chain or a rope around a tree, shutting doors, a metaphorical closing of the world (?) with a key moved about in the air, etc.
- ³³ I intentionally bypassed the role of the dual nature of posthumous operations since it is difficult to determine which comprise an element of the burial ceremonial and which, focused on the future, are supposed to facilitate the return (rebirth) of the deceased; they are thus rather connected with birth.
- ³⁴ A. Van Gennep, *Rites de passage*, Paris 1909, pp. 14-18, 271-279.
- ³⁵ The period of transition is situated between two separate states, thus linking simultaneously the elements of both. This process can be described as: $A = (x + y)$ and $(-x -y)$. Note: this formula is not a logical sentence.
- ³⁶ It must be stressed that we regard as *rites de passage* only those that separate differentiated time categories. Not every annual festivity, therefore, is a *rite de passage*.
- ³⁷ I have in mind a general tendency, since there exists a certain small collection of forms of Alcmene’s magic specific for particular ritual cycles.
- ³⁸ Operations + occur in the case of all the saints in the table. See, i.a. R. Tomicki, *Wierzenia i obrzędy związane ze śmiercią w tradycji społeczności wiejskich* (typescript at the disposal of the Chair of Ethnography at Warsaw University), Warszawa 1972, pp. 84-85, 129-130; W. Kosiński, *Materyały etnograficzne zebrane w różnych okolicach Galicji Zachodniej*, Kraków 1903, p. 62, 63, 66, 78, 84; W. Klinger, *Doroczne święta ludowe a tradycje grecko-rzymskie*, Kraków 1931, p. 77; Baranowski, op. cit., p. 80; Świętek, op. cit., p. 558; Bystron, op. cit., p. 15.
- ³⁹ This is a splendid example of enhancing magic by closing an object that by the very nature of things possesses opposite properties. W. Szuchiewicz, *Huculszczyzna*, Lwów 1904, vol. III, p. 248 and p. 12, 14, 18, 221, 224, 226, 243, 246, 248-250, 268, 294.
- ⁴⁰ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, pp. 318-324.
- ⁴¹ It should be stressed that all *rites de passage* enumerated in the table possess a distinctive solar nature. They do not, however, include *rites de passage* of the economic cycle.
- ⁴² This holiday is celebrated predominantly in regions inhabited by a Russian Orthodox population.
- ⁴³ See above.
- ⁴⁴ The application of Alcmene’s magic is rather clearly associated with the autumn equinox, while its connection with the feast day of St. Michael is presumably rather late (nineteenth century?).
- ⁴⁵ V a n Gennep, op. cit., pp. 271-279.
- ⁴⁶ Świętek, op. cit., pp. 539-540; Tomicki, op. cit., pp. 82-84.
- ⁴⁷ K. Koranyi, *Czary i gusła przed sądami kościelnymi*, “Lud”, vol. XXVI, fasc. 2, p. 11, 17.
- ⁴⁸ I. a. M. El i a d e, *Sacrum – mit – historia*, Warszawa 1970, p. 89.
- ⁴⁹ F. Gajczyk, *Teodulja*, Kraków 1900, pp. 112-132.
- ⁵⁰ Ł. Gołębiowski, *Lud polski, jego zwyczaje i zabobony*, Warszawa 1830, p. 150, 170-171; R. Lilienthalowa, *Święta żydowskie w przeszłości i teraźniejszości*, Kraków 1919, p. 26; Baranowski, op. cit., p. 106; Klinger, op. cit., p. 58; Kosiński, op. cit., p. 11; Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, passim; Tomicki, op. cit., pp. 77-81, 83, 88-90, 100-102.
- ⁵¹ For example, a phase in the family cycle between death and rebirth.
- ⁵² The table takes into account only 91,22% of the general set (see: note 24) of cases owing to the fact that the remaining 8,78% are scattered across as many as 17 categories and possess the features of disturbances.
- ⁵³ In accordance with the previously accepted terminology we thus write down the phenomenon as: $(x + y)$ and $(-x -y)$.
- ⁵⁴ $A = (x + y)$ i $(-x -y)$.
- ⁵⁵ I. a. T. Seweryn, *Ikografia etnograficzna*, “Lud”, vol. XXXIX, p. 340; S. Gansiniec, *Pas magiczny*, Kraków 1934.
- ⁵⁶ It occurs not only in folk culture but also in the “professional” magic of yore (F. Ribadeau-Dumas, *Histoire de la magie*, Paris 1965, pp. 80-156).
- ⁵⁷ For an explanation of the demonic nature of water nymphs see: Tomicki, op. cit., p. 81.
- ⁵⁸ Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 319, 322.
- ⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 323.
- ⁶⁰ K. Baschwitz, *Czarownice, dzieje procesów o czary*, Warszawa 1971, p. 15, 17, 21.
- ⁶¹ Owing to insufficient space I shall not cite proof legitimating the addition of the category of paths – this will be the topic of a separate article.
- ⁶² Certain ethnographers, such as Moszyński, accepted implicitly that due to the differentiated evaluation in folk culture of particular fragments of space, village borders, fences, the threshold, etc. always divide the states.

- 63 Mentioned by Theophrastus Bombastus aka Paracelsus, and Johannes Trithemius.
- 64 Moszyński, op. cit., vol. II, part 1, p. 202, 322; Świętek, op. cit., p. 459.
- 65 T. Łętocha, *Granice i spory terytorialne w Afryce*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 19-26.
- 66 The passage periods in the 24hr cycle are: midnight (24. 00), noon (12. 00) and the setting and rising of the Sun.
- 67 Here, naturally, meaning: under the fence, under the threshold.
- 68 Obviously, witches as living creatures do not belong to the category of demons. $\langle \rangle A = (x + y)$ and $(-x + -y)$.
- 69 I have in mind burials and sites of revelations since the remaining are mentioned in the table only for the sake of comparison.
- 70 "All" means "all enumerated in the article" since there exist other ranges of the presence of Alcmene's magic.
- 71 The number of such formulae subjected to analysis totals 200, with the exception of four cases, i.e. 98% confirmed the observations presented here.
- 72 N. Mastret described this dimension simply as cosmic, which appears to excessively restrict its meaning.



Piotr Borowski, Expedition to the East Poland, see: *Koniec pieśni* (The End of Song), "Konteksty" No. 2-3/2010

Polesia Czar and a childhood landscape

Zbigniew Benedyktowicz: We are to talk about memory and its significance in contemporaneity as well as its assorted forms and manners of appearance. Let us, however, start with your private and most intimate “memory place”, the very onset of your biography. You must have been asked often about the Polesie region and the town of Pińsk – your birthplace and the land of your childhood...

Ryszard Kapuściński: I am constantly requested to comment about all sorts of things and endlessly about Polesie. This is also a moral problem, because I am the only living writer born in Pińsk. At the moment, I thus live as if under social pressure and feel some sort of a moral obligation. We know very well that everyone is writing about Wilno and Lwów, and that Polesie and Pińsk are situated exactly halfway between those two. Polesie is a somewhat poor and abandoned land and little has been written about it.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Do you frequently compare that, which you remember as a child and that, which you encounter now? Do such confrontations reveal something permanent?

R. Kapuściński: I often travel there whenever I am capable of doing so and have the time. Here stands the house in which I was born and here lies the cemetery with the graves of those closest to me, members of my family. My grandmother and cousins were buried



Street and family home of Ryszard Kapuściński in Pińsk

RYSZARD KAPUŚCIŃSKI

On Memory and Its Threats - Ryszard Kapuściński Talks with Zbigniew Benedyktowicz and Dariusz Czaja

here. My parents were elementary school teachers in Pińsk and up to this day some of the locals remember them. I am even an honorary member of the Polish Circle in Belarus. Finally, some of the old streets have survived.

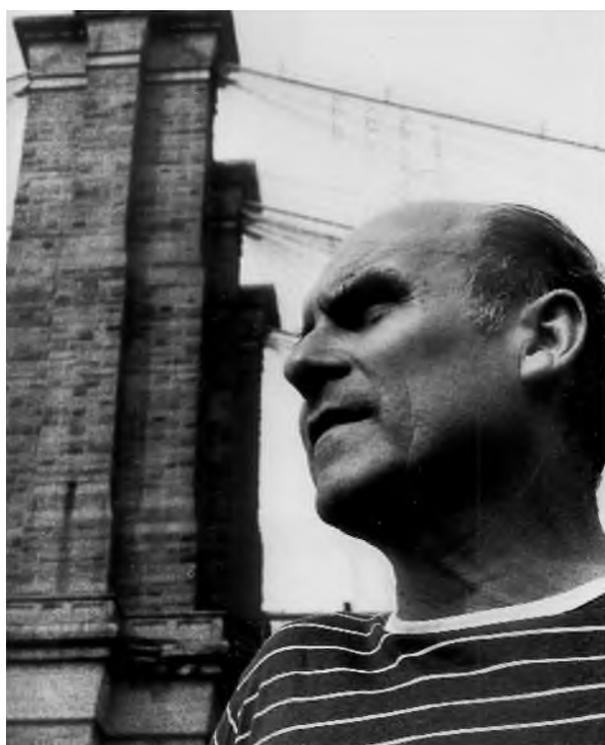
Z. Benedyktowicz: What about the landscape and Nature?

R. Kapuściński: Polesie was an extremely exotic part of Europe, a land of sprawling marshes with only a single road from Brześć (Brest) to Pińsk built of paving stones; the rest was composed of bogs or dunes. It was simply impossible to reach certain villages, accessible only by boat or, in the winter, by sleigh. Communication was maintained with boats. That world no longer exists. During the Soviet era the marshes were drained and turned into deserts. Paradoxically, part of Polesie survived thanks to the Red Army, which set up training areas; consequently, it was forbidden to do or change anything. This part of Polesie preserved its original form. On the other hand, people of the past are no longer, or only a very small number has survived. The policy pursued during the Soviet period consisted of a “Russification” of the area close to the border. Russians arrived from further inland and, consequently, the character of the whole region underwent great transformations. The Borderlands still feature much of their allure. This is a magnificent theme, since the Borderlands character remains, predominantly within the inhabitants. People of the Borderlands stick together and Polesie circles are active in Gdańsk and Wrocław. In the various parts of the world that I visited I always met Poleszczuki – former residents of Polesie, who came to see me and wanted to talk about the past and show photographs. In New York or London someone would appear and pointing to a photo say: “Look. Here’s your Mum”. Sometimes, they brought photographs taken in their schooldays ...

Z. Benedyktowicz: This is interesting in view of the fact that sociological studies or publicistics stress predominantly the threat of globalisation. Your exam-



In Polesie...



In New York... New York 1984. Photo: Andrzej Strumillo

ple shows how assorted local peripheral cultures successfully function alongside this process ...

R. Kapuściński: Yes, this is an extremely strong phenomenon. I believe that it is the reverse of globalisation. It is the latter menace that sets free a feeling of distinctness, a certain need for identity and belonging to some sort of a local community. Those bonds are extremely powerful. It is because I come from Pińsk that people bring to those meetings assorted photographs and items that they took from there. These durable relations contain a certain emotional load. The people in question are extremely proud of the fact that they are the carriers of memory and willingly gather to reminisce.

By way of example, I say: "Alright, would you like to write all this down and then mail it to me, because I

shall be leaving soon?" And that person sits down and describes everything. The recollections are at times extraordinary, as in the case of a 90 years-old lady who now lives near Wrocław. I also possess an enormous collection of photographs. It was even suggested to organise a large-scale exhibition of my photographs of Pińsk. This memory about a world of the past is really very much alive. Travelling across the world I appreciate the power of the feeling of identity and attachment to one's birthplace, that small homeland. Despite enormous and growing emigration people leaving their native land take those feelings with them and thus cherish the strongest possible connection with the "small homeland". This awareness of identity linked with a concrete place is man's great need. It is the reason why Africa is so fascinating as a continent that has preserved tribal awareness in a most visible, palpable, and experienced form. This is not the consciousness of a "generalised" person, but regional, local awareness. Apparently, there is no such thing as an awareness of the homeland – the homeland is a fluid concept in the history of societies, a rather artificial product of our mentality; it is tribal awareness that is the strongest in man.

Z. Benedyktowicz: What if we were to try to establish at this exact moment that what has been preserved in your memory first and foremost?

R. Kapuściński: What do I remember? It seems to me that we are dealing here with a much wider problem. My thesis about memory is as follows - ask: when does man come into being? Not biologically, but when does he start existing as a human being? In my opinion, he emerges with the very first reminiscence that can be reached. We thus search while saying: "I remember this, and this, and one more thing", and in this way we arrive at the very first recollection when we no longer remember anything that occurred earlier. It is exactly at that point that man begins and "I" emerges, that my identity and my extremely individual, private life story start. I am in the habit of asking people: "What is the first recollection of your life?" Two things arise upon this occasion.

The first is the discovery that so few people actually think about this, and that they begin to laboriously recollect. Generally speaking, people do not ponder this theme and are forced to dig deep in order to reach their first memory. The second issue concerns the character of those reminiscences. I have asked hundreds of people about this, and it is interesting to discover that each has different recollections. Some are linked with a cat, another - with a fire, and yet others with a boiled sweet purchased by grandmother. These reminiscences vary greatly, and are one of the proofs of man's differentiation. Already the very first recollections distinguish us to such a great extent.

Dariusz Czaja: What do you consider to be the point of departure for memory? What is it? Is it a word? Colour ...?

R. Kapuściński: An image!

Z. Benedyktowicz: An image? And not sound?

R. Kapuściński: It will always be an image. After all, we know that earliest reminiscences concern the period when we were three or four years old, more or less the age when a child thinks in images. As a rule, this is a case of visual recollections. Even if there did take place some sort of a loud noise, such as thunder, it too must have been associated with an image, either of a storm or the place where it took place. I always found this phenomenon extremely interesting and noteworthy. I would like to write about my childhood in Pińsk.

The chaos of memory and the order introduced into it

Z. Benedyktowicz: You have just mentioned that, as a rule, people are forced to delve deep into their memory in order to reach their first reminiscence. Did you encounter such a phenomenon also in your life, when earliest recollections find themselves beneath those that are “worked over”, and about which we know that they are the property of others and had been already heard somewhere?

R. Kapuściński: Yes, this has to be cleared up. This is the Husserlian idea of purification. Arrival at these primary things is extremely difficult, especially in the case of those about which we had been already told. This is connected with two overlapping problems with memory and reminiscences. The first is the introduction of order. It turns out that we find it very difficult to put all those recalled images into order and thus encounter certain chaos. In other words, the process of introducing order must be purposeful, conscious, and intended – I must arrange everything in order and determine what was “before” or “after”. It becomes necessary to establish the sequences of certain events. This is extremely important for memory. Secondly, that, which is essentially linked with memory or perhaps with its absence is the fact that memory is fragmentary and without a continuum. We remember only certain episodes from the past but do not have access to their complete sequence.

D. Czaja: Additionally, it is interesting to note that we immediately arrange them into some sort of a plot, construe narration, and gather those details into a linear sequence.

R. Kapuściński: We have to do this, otherwise we shall get lost and everything will simply scatter. In other words, in order for memory to function usefully it requires certain operations and effort. This is not automatic since that, which autonomously imposes itself is chaotic, fragmentary, and non-cohesive. Only

the operation of introducing order and hierarchy, the arrangement of memory, becomes extremely relevant. I think in a certain way because I am writing an autobiographical reportage and constantly encounter this problem. I recall an episode from an African country but cannot remember when it took place. What occurred “before” and “after”? Did I stay there in 1967 or perhaps in 1968? Was it Ghana or rather the Republic of South Africa? Here problems start and demand serious effort.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Do you keep such a diary?

R. Kapuściński: No, I am incapable of doing this simply because my journeys are extremely exhausting physically. As a rule, they take place in the tropics, there is a lot of work in progress and texts that have to be immediately handed over; later, I am so tired that I do not have the strength for anything else. Years later, I am compelled to reconstruct the past out of elements: airplane tickets, passport visas, various other things. Furthermore, there is yet another problem, the reason why I am not a great enthusiast of diaries. A person who keeps a diary writes down every day that, which he regards as important. Reading it years later it turns out that usually such records make but a slight contribution. This fact is associated with the selective role of memory.

Take the highly instructive reminiscence about Gorky, who upon a certain occasion was introduced to a young writer named Paustovsky who brought one of his stories. Gorky read it and they made an arrangement to meet again. Gorky said: “Young man, this text shows talent, but I would like to give you a piece of advice: spend the next ten years travelling across Russia, working and earning a living. Write nothing. Do not keep any notes. Once you return, make a record of all that you saw. Why then? Because you shall remember that, which was truly significant, while that, which you do not recall was simply not worth remembering”.

At this moment I am writing *Podróże z Herodotem*, i.e. about experiences that took place in the 1950s. I still recall them. By way of example, in 1956, upon the wave of the October thaw, my editorial board sent me for the first time to India. I flew *via* Rome, in an old wartime DC-3. The airplane landed in Rome in the evening. For the first time in my life I saw a town all lit up. This came as such a shock that although fifty years have passed I still remember precisely the view of the illuminated city at night.... This is why I firmly believe in the selective role played by memory. There is no need to remember everything because such a process serves no purpose.

D. Czaja: But this would produce an interesting conclusion. Apparently, it is not we who consciously and intentionally put those data into order or construct an image of the past pertaining to us; this process takes place somewhere “in the back of the head”,

without our will. In other words, we contain some sort of a selection mechanism that is nothing else but a resultant of all the significant events in our heretofore life.

R. Kapuściński: Yes. It is not that, which I daily decide that I shall remember or forget that is important. It suddenly turns out that I recall a certain thing, which, actually, I should not remember but by some miracle it exists in my memory. Then I start wondering why this is taking place and why I recollect precisely that thing and not another.

D. Czaja: At this stage there comes into being a certain subtlety, not to say: difficulty, probably not the last that we shall discuss today while drifting between memory and oblivion. I have in mind selection associated with memory. You mentioned the “introduction of order” into memory data. If we, however, perform a slight semantic retouching then we shall immediately arrive at the “construction” of memory. Another slight shift and we are dealing with a “mythicisation” of memory. How can those subtleties be separated? Is it at all possible to introduce some sort of an acute distinction? When do we once again deal with such remembrance of the past about which we may say: “This truly took place”, and when with something that I described as the mythologisation of memory or, if we speak about the collective dimension, with the ideologisation of memory? After all, each of those operations performs some sort of a selection, right?

R. Kapuściński: In my opinion there is no unambiguous response to this question. All depends on the given person, the situation in which he finds himself, and many different factors. As a reporter I might say that in this case the foundation is some sort of an ethical attitude, an elementary compulsion that says: “I remember that”. This means that I am responsible for what I wrote. In other words, I guarantee that I had really experienced something, that the book contains my experience. This was my argument while writing at the time of prevailing censorship. If the censors complained I answered: “I was there, and if you want to, then come with me”. It seems to me that personal experience constituted the foundation of what I wrote. At the same time, it provided me with a feeling of power. I do not know how to write, nor am I a typical author. My problem consists of the fact that I am deprived of that sort of imagination, and thus I have to actually be everywhere in order to write something, I have to personally remember things. Everything must leave a direct imprint on my memory. Then, when I come back, I do not deliberate about the form in which I am going to write – a poem, a drama or a philosophical treatise; I simply try to write a text. The point is for this text to be the most faithful recreation of the memory of my experiences, of what I saw and thought. Naturally, I am fully aware that this is all very subjective, i.e. that

everyone sees reality differently. I often encountered this phenomenon during assorted meetings with my readers. Someone stands up and says: “Mister, I saw what you described but it was quite different...”. And I absolutely believe him because the number of assorted versions of the same events corresponds to the number of its witnesses. Consequently, there is no such thing as objective memory. Nothing of the sort exists. Memory is the most subjectivised element of culture. We really remember extremely different things. I have a sister who is a year younger and lives in Canada. I did not see her for years and once we met I, thinking about Pińsk, reached for a tape recorder, saying: “Basia, what do you recollect from our years in Pińsk?”. Let me add that we are very close and when we were little we always walked holding hands. One could thus say that we saw exactly the same thing. When she began to extract reflections from her memory it turned out that they were totally different from mine. In other words: she remembered things that I did not recollect at all. And *vice versa*. You can see just how strong is the individualisation of memory. As a result, I always use the formula: “according to me, this is what happened”. I could never say that my perception is the only true one.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Despite this radical subjectivisation of memory there also exists something like the memory of a generation, perhaps not as objective but one in which people can at least recognise themselves...

R. Kapuściński: Naturally. The memory of a generation or of a nation – they both exist. Just like collective memory I too possess deep archetypical strata, that whole Jungian phenomenon. But in my personal experience as a reporter, a person travelling around the world, collecting observations and stories, and writing about them I am most fascinated by the fact that memory is individualised....

D. Czaja: ... that the past is perceived differently in each personal experience ...

R. Kapuściński: ... extremely so. This is what I find so fascinating in Herodotus, because it turns out that he already tackled these difficulties. The reason lay in the fact that his writing was connected directly with the problem of memory. Recall the opening invocation of his book: *These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done*. Herodotus struggled with the obliteration of memory, encountered already at the time. By way of example, upon his arrival in Thebes he discovered that everyone said something different about a certain past event. To this he responded that he was obliged to describe assorted versions. His task consisted of a faithful presentation. He felt compelled to propose an objective account. It was Herodotus who was the

first in world literature to announce this differentiation of memory and the image of the past. We know, however, that past reality resembles quicksand. We all make our way along this sandy terrain, of which no one is certain.

D. Czaja: There undoubtedly exists some sort of tension between subjectivity and the objective image of a thing. You mentioned that Herodotus attempted to coordinate various versions of the past. He too, however, was probably not free from subjectivity. Within the context of your recollections of the past you mention the individualisation of memory and the subjectivity of the image of the past. There arises the following problem: what is the situation of an historian who tries to trust memory (witnesses or documents) but, at the same time, tries to solve the question repeated after Ranke: “What actually happened” (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)? To put it directly: he attempts to be objective. Do you, in the wake of numerous texts demythologising our naive faith in “genuine reality” recreated by the historian, still believe in the objectivism of historical studies, the scientific, to coin a term, image of the past?

R. Kapuściński: My approach is as follows: I regard the key to such situations and problems to be the French term: *approximation*. In other words, such objectivism is possible only in an approximated form. *Approximation* means that we harbour certain ideals, which we accept and in some way assume. I would like to write an ideal book. But all that I am capable of doing is, at best, to come close to the theoretical ideal, which I have adopted. The same situation occurs in science and the humanities. Everything is *approximation*. Importance is attached to the degree in which we manage to approximate this devised collective ideal. Some succeed in approaching it extremely close whilst others will never attain it. An historian who assumes that he will write an objective book about the battle of Grunwald also presupposes some sort of cognitive ideal. The degree to which he will attain it will become the yardstick of his work. We cannot achieve an absolute because this is simply impossible, and the yardstick of assessing our effort is the degree of approximation to this absolute.

D. Czaja: Fine, but how do we know that we are coming close to the epistemological absolute?

R. Kapuściński: Social awareness contains a functioning concept of the ideal. We feel that a certain novel, for example, *In Search of Lost Time* by Proust, comes close to it, or that Joyce succeeded, but some inferior author did not. This is a collective comprehension of the ideal, just as Znaniecki wrote in *Spoleczne role uczonych* that someone is eminent in a given domain of science. How is one to define who is brilliant in a certain field? The solution proposed by Znaniecki claims that a group of specialists regards someone as

outstanding. This is the criterion, and there is no other. In my opinion, the same holds true for every ideal.

D. Czaja: In other words, this would take place according to the principle of some sort of consensus, a collective contract, right?

R. Kapuściński: Yes, this is the case. Joint reflection, joint evaluation, joint comprehension. This is how I envisage it. I am incapable of discovering a different criterion defining why a particular reportage is considered better than another. People, members of a group, simply think that someone is better, another is worse, and yet another is superior.

D. Czaja: Or could it be that what we describe as “the truth of the past” is simply a function of the time, in which it had been formulated? Let us take a closer look at mediaevalist research in the past several decades. After all, this is not the case of an avalanche discovery of some new, previously unknown documents. The image of the Middle Ages, nonetheless, changed from the infamous “Dark Ages” to excellent multi-strata studies, such as those by Gurievich or recent publications by Le Roy Ladurie. What will happen to those visions of the Middle Ages in another several decades?

R. Kapuściński: The humanities as a whole are deeply immersed in living and endlessly active matter. In Brzozowski’s brilliant definition of memory the latter is always working and transposing, and there is no such thing about which we could find out something once and for all. He was of the opinion that it is matter that succumbs to constant transformation.

D. Czaja: If this is so, then perhaps it is the ideal as such that is fiction?

R. Kapuściński: Yes, because this ideal too changes. I maintain that the greatness of the humanities consists of the fact that we permanently work with matter subjected to limitless transformation. It is fascinating to follow its trends and assorted varieties. This is what I find so unusual and interesting. Furthermore, it testifies to the quality of the human intellect.

Bad memory, repressed memory

D. Czaja: We are speaking the whole time about the positive function of memory, memory that salvages, creative memory, and, finally, memory building our identity thanks to which we know who we are and where we come from. I would like us – and by no means due to contrariness – to speak for a while about the sort of memory that can produce resistance and about unwanted, negative memory.

Our discussion thus cannot lack Nietzsche and his celebrated and highly controversial text: *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. What does Nietzsche tell us? He declared more or less: why do you want to remember? This is the hump that you carry at all times. *The excess of history has seized the plastic force of life. It*

no longer understands how to make use of the past as a powerful nourishment. A whole diatribe against historians and the historical sense. Nietzsche criticised a stand that perceives the world through the prism of sight always focused on the past. He was irritated by the fact that in this manner we build a society that erects shrines to the past and the old.

My question too embarks upon this Nietzschean motif of memory that could become a burden and an obstacle, and which does not create but hampers, especially if it pertains to a cohesive tribal group. Take the example of the war in the Balkans. It is said at times, while observing the frenzied Balkan melting pot, that, paradoxically, if local population groups remembered less and did not accuse each other of the suffering endured in the past, during the lifetime of their fathers or grandparents, and if they were capable of forgetting, then the bloody massacres of the 1990s would have never taken place. What is your opinion about such a portrayal of this issue?

R. Kapuściński: I do not share this opinion. I disagree with Nietzsche, especially considering that today we endure assorted problems involving memory and there exist a number of serious threats entailing memory loss.

On the other hand, here are several remarks about tribalism. Unfortunately, this particular word is endowed with a negative meaning and Africans find its use offensive and prefer “nationality” or “people”. They consider *tribe* or *tribalism* to be anathema.

In order to understand what actually took place in the Balkans it is necessary to introduce a certain differentiation, to distinguish between tribal awareness and its use for political purposes and strife. This somewhat resembles the use of a knife to cut bread and ... throats. The same holds true for tribalism, which in itself is an enormous value to be applied either for the sake of a political game or one conducted for winning power and certain political profits. From this point of view, tribalism is a powerful feeling of local community, neither better nor worse than any other emotion. In political games it is possible to make use of every sort of feeling with a tangible outcome. In the Balkans such emotions were applied for destructive and outright murderous purposes. After all, scores of generations led normal lives in harmony. Mixed marriages abounded. Pińsk, where I was born, was an international small town, where 72% of the population was composed of Jews, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Latvians and Lithuanians. There was no feeling of radical animosity. Leaving Pińsk I was bereft of all ethnic awareness and was even unconscious of its existence. We all lived together. As long as a burning fuse is not inserted into such diverse matter - and this can be done only from the outside - there is no threat. It is not part of man's nature, and without that external factor he will

not become ablaze with hatred. This is simply something that man lacks.

D. Czaja: I seriously doubt it. After all, we all belong to “the tribe of Cain”, right? I recently watched a shocking British documentary about Srebrenica. Naturally, we know that men have been killing as long as the world exists, but the scale and type of those murders, totally impartial, exceeds all boundaries of our imagination...

R. Kapuściński: True, this is already bestiality. Once the wheel of hatred is set into motion it becomes difficult to stop it. I constantly repeat that I am concerned with one thing: that people will never start anything of this sort by themselves! Take the example of a multi-tribal African town in which every inhabitant has his street and house. Nothing special takes place. Suddenly, one day, agitators arrive and declare: “Listen, you're poor while that man on the next street is a member of the ruling elite; wouldn't you like to be one, too? If you continue to remain passive you'll die of hunger and achieve nothing...”. This is the way things start. People go into the streets brandishing machetes and start fighting “for their cause”, killing and assaulting. This is the type of mechanism I am concerned with. More exactly, I am anxious about the fact that such a feeling of tribal affiliation may be easily used for political purposes.

D. Czaja: I agree, but it must fall on susceptible ground. Inciting one against the other only awakens dormant demons. And they do really exist!

R. Kapuściński: True, very often they only have to be awakened. I do not maintain that man is an ideal creature, but I do claim that every person contains all sorts of features. It all depends on the sort of traits to which we refer and which we stir. I affirm that man as such does not act in this manner as if “from the inside” and that only certain circumstances will awaken the negative, dark side. This is what I have in mind. True, such darkness exists as an imminent component in a dormant state that could be described as passive. In order to achieve it, it is necessary to create suitable conditions. This is the case with tribalism. On the other hand, I repeat obstinately that clan, family or tribal bonds are an extremely positive emotion since it enables us to function in the world. An individual simply cannot exist outside a clan. This is the essence of the philosophy of African societies and, generally speaking, the philosophy of clan societies as such.

Here lies also one of the differences between the East and the West. In Western civilisation it is the individual who is the most prominent, and we deal with the liberty of the individual, his rights, and so on. In non-Western societies the situation is the reverse – supreme value is attached to the collective, a fact that simply follows from different historical experience, i.e. the individual could not survive in conditions created

by local poverty and is forced to seek the support of the community. Only the latter is capable of facing Nature. The individual is incapable of doing this and of taming Nature. In a word, subjugation to the collective is a condition for endurance in contrast to developed Western civilisation where the individual can easily survive and relish assorted rights. This is a certain luxury, i.e. the enjoyment of civic rights and similar privileges that the highly technological society can well afford. Poor society, dependent on Nature, cannot afford this.

Back to the Balkans. The whole story, as we know, started at the time of the Turkish invasion. Previously, this was a normal and peaceful community. At a certain moment, tribal animosities were stimulated and kept alive. At this stage, the basic issue comes to the fore. My theory about the origin of tribal and national conflicts claims that war did not start on 1 September 1939, nor did it break out on the day when the first shots were fired. In the contemporary world, war begins with changes in the language of propaganda. Whenever we observe language and the way in which it transforms itself and certain words start to appear then it becomes obvious that suddenly there come into being such terms as: enemy, foe, to destroy, to kill ... i.e. there emerges a language of aggression and hatred or, to put it differently, so-called hate speech. There is still no sign of war and nothing is said about it, but the language of communication begins to alter. At that very moment, in the wake of those vagaries of the language and their intensification, we notice the looming menace of war. This process could be classically observed in the Balkans. I claim that each war, be it in Iraq, the Balkans or any other country, starts in this manner.

D. Czaja: Let us, therefore, make matters clear. Our issue presents an extremely interesting fragment of the most recent book by Paul Ricoeur on history, memory, and oblivion. We include a chapter on how to successfully tackle the difficult problem of bad memory. This is a thoroughly practical question and I am even inclined to agree with you that tribalism as such is not a threat. The war in the Balkans has come to an end, and now what? What about memory that does not wish to forget? What should be done about it? It is easy to say: testify, educate, and teach. All this is fine, but we do not really believe in the effectiveness of such activity. After all, we had our *Sąsiedzi*. We also recently held a difficult and painful discussion about Jedwabne. Now what? Should the whole problem be simply described, explained, recalled, and taught at school? Certainly. But something else must also be done. I agree with Ricoeur who wrote about the need for the Freudian term: “the work of mourning”, some sort of grief tackling the past. Powerful suffering, a process of filtering the facts. Otherwise, when

traumatic experiences of the past become relegated to textbooks or even, as in the case of Jedwabne, state ceremonies are held, without private mourning we shall as a community enjoy the comfort of feeling that everything has been already done and now we can enjoy peace and quiet. It has all become part of the past. What is your opinion?

R. Kapuściński: Naturally, this is an extensive theme, dramatic and, for all practical purposes, one that does not offer any solutions. I have in mind the fact that the moment when such development has been revealed, the dynamic of destructive processes is appalling. Once this Pandora's box has been opened it becomes extremely difficult to close it again. It will probably be never possible to shut it tightly, a feat that will remain unaccomplished for the next few generations. It is here that time starts to exert an impact. The once incited bloody conflict and the instigation of hatred possess terrible results and cannot be set right in a brief space of time. This is an exceedingly painful circumstance. Man's great frailty consists of the fact that he is unable to abandon it either ultimately or satisfactorily for many generations. Up to this very day, despite the passage of decades, certain societies are completely unable to confront reality. By way of example, Japanese society still refuses to settle accounts with the memory of its past crimes. This great nation is incapable of even approaching the problem. I believe that the task in question is too demanding and horrible ...

D. Czaja: But something must be done and things cannot be left unchanged.

R. Kapuściński: Theoretically, you are right. Naturally, I have in mind good will and intentions. In such cases it is necessary to return to those problems, face them, and mull them over. Once again, this has to be attained with a conviction that in this case too there functions an *approximation* mechanism, i.e. that we may only draw closer to the solution of such questions. This is a case of human weakness, and matters of this sort cannot be ultimately resolved.

D. Czaja: Perhaps this could become the moment when it becomes possible to embark upon the work of, so to speak, wise forgetting. The latter would involve grief or at the very least be preceded by some sort of reflection, if not atonement.

R. Kapuściński: Yes, this is certainly right. Nonetheless, the process in question could be accomplished in relation to only a certain part of society or individuals, but it is difficult to imagine that it could refer to entire societies and communities.

D. Czaja: I insist that something should be done because scores of examples testify that a simple ejection of traumatic past events from memory actually does not yield anything.

R. Kapuściński: It generates nothing because reality stays on.

D. Czaja: Sometimes, it returns with even greater force.

R. Kapuściński: Yes. I think that this is one of those weaknesses of human nature, the nature of societies with which we simply do not know how to deal. There are multiple things about which we do not know what should be done. They entail great themes and equally great weaknesses, such as human cruelty. For centuries, people have been embarking upon similar questions and we are still incapable of tackling them successfully. Dostoevsky was always fascinated by the mystery of unnecessary, disinterested cruelty. A person has killed? Yes. But why does he quarter, slice, boil, why does he additionally... why, why...?

We are incapable of resolving such questions. The essence and greatness of the humanities probably lie in the fact that they recognize the existence of a range of queries to which we shall never find solutions.

Threats to memory and time of commemoration

Z. Benedyktowicz: Let us now discuss the threats to memory looming in contemporary culture, which you mentioned on the margin. In what domains of life would you situate them? Of what are they supposed to consist?

R. Kapuściński: In my opinion, there are three such threats. The first entails the enormous development of mechanical memory carriers, which means that man is slowly unlearning the art of remembrance. The art of memory is something that has to be mastered; one has to learn how to remember. Today, everything is transposed into a computer, a book, a record, an encyclopaedia. We no longer – as has been the case until recently – have to learn everything by heart nor do we have to train our memory since everything is recorded on assorted carriers. Memory is as if relegated from our heads and transferred into mechanical memory carriers although it is an absolutely essential part of human awareness, which Plato described as the soul. The process of getting rid of the art of remembrance poses a very grave menace for human personality. This is by no means a purely mechanical problem. It is something more: it pertains to man's skills and ability to think, to his and our identity. This peril is growing. In the course of the development of the "net" and the computerisation and electronisation of life we shall steadily become invalids as far as our memory is concerned.

The second threat facing memory is, in my opinion, an excess of data. As the British say: abundance of riches. Human awareness is simply flooded with such an amount of information that it is no longer capable of mastering it. This excess acts in the manner of

an avalanche, a burden that makes life impossible and produces permanent exhaustion. Existing information exceeds many times the capacity of the average human intellect.

Finally, the third threat involves the enormous acceleration of historical processes. This means that history used to follow a slow course. Three hundred years ago nothing took place, two hundred years ago – the same, and the human mind was adapted to that tempo. Man could absorb historical moments and those of his life. History exerted a stabilising effect. Man lived in a constant environment, which he was capable of encompassing within his memory and mastering. Now, due to terrible acceleration, on the one hand, temporal and, on the other hand, spatial, with space and time acting as our two fundamental orientation points in the world we have lost the feeling of stabilisation and enrootment in the world.

D. Czaja: How would you, in connection with this multi-trend loss of memory by contemporary society, define our epoch, the time in which we live? By way of example, Pierre Nora, author of the already classical *Les Lieux de mémoire*, seems to be saying something quite different: we live at a time of commemoration, a time of gathering memories. Take a look at numerous memory "sites": museums, archives, compendia, diaries, monuments – assorted "appliances" for remembering. What is actually taking place: are we living at a time of memory or a time of forgetting?

R. Kapuściński: Naturally, museums and archives do exist. I, however, am concerned with something quite different, namely, that more and more of our interior is being extracted and delegated to assorted institutions. I have in mind the entire institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of memory. Various institutions are being established – in Poland, for example, the Institute of National Remembrance – to organise our memory. We are becoming increasingly convinced that "they" will deal with the issue at stake. "They" have their archives and the individual, as I have mentioned, is getting rid of his memory and dispatching it to an anonymous institution. I am concerned with distinctive memory, the sort that differentiates us. This is the memory that we develop in time and *via* which we create ourselves, our identity, and personality. We differ, i.a. due to the fact that we have diverse memories, that each one of us remembers different things and values, and becomes attached to certain stages or types of memory.

Furthermore, I am concerned with the fact that the statement that we live at a time of remembrance can be at most a symbol of the fact that we live at a time of increasingly institutionalised memory and less so at a time of memory as a personal, private value.

D. Czaja: Perhaps it would be possible to combine those two things. It could be deduced already



Africa. Photo: Ryszard Kapuściński

from what you have said that the search conducted in one's past, described by scholars, the quest for family genealogies, literary or cinematic returns to the time of childhood, museum tours, the universal predilection among readers for diaries, and various types of nostalgia, in a word, the whole movement "towards memory" is some sort of a counter-reaction to the earlier mentioned civilisation acceleration. Could this be an instinctive defence against Miłosz's *accélération d'histoire*, that powerful and still encroaching variability of daily life?

R. Kapuściński: I do not claim that these phenomena exclude each other. I do maintain, however, that the situation in which the art of remembering is handed over to institutions is a dangerous tendency. Nor do I insist that this is a case of either one or the other. We know that by the very nature of things man is a lazy creature and prefers to seek diverse facilitations in life; hence I discern in this process a trend towards rendering life easier. This is not a charge addressed against technology. Imagine, however, a situation in which everything has been already computerised and suddenly a virus attacks this digitally recorded memory. It could then turn out that we shall remain totally deprived of all memory. Naturally, I am speaking about certain hazards, those bad paths of civilizational progress. I do not maintain that all is a catastrophe nor do I prophecy the end of the world.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Earlier, you mentioned threats facing memory in the contemporary world in connection with the development of new technologies. To what extent, in your opinion, could conventional divisions into societies "with history" and "without history", once existing in anthropology, be referred to the contemporary world? Is it possible to speak today about "societies with memory" and "without memory"? Characteristically, American culture used to be described as culture without memory not because it has a relatively brief history but also owing to a distinct appreciation of the present, for living for the moment, for life without that constant gazing into the past, so typical for Europe. Quite possibly, the absence of significant traumatic experiences is the reason why in that model of culture people are so insensitive to the past and do not experience so strongly the pressure of the duty to remember and to conserve memory. Is American culture really like that? How does this appear from the perspective of your American experiences?

R. Kapuściński: We live in a world in which multicultural qualities are a norm. We are enclosed within a world of assorted cultures and traditions offering us totally dissimilar commodities. On the one hand, we are dealing with societies dominated by oral cultures: i.e. the societies of America, Latin America or Asia, where this symptom of values really prevails. There

exists yet another type of society, bearing the heavy burden of historical thought. It includes our society and European societies in general. History constitutes a large part of our culture: historical thought, the symbolic of historical memory, the feeling of a continuum in time. Then there is a third group of new societies, whose roots stem from emigration and whose history is relatively brief: the USA, Canada, Australia, and other, smaller ones. They are no more than 200 years old and are not burdened with history; thus their world faces the future. One could say that the future is their past.

But this too is changing. Take a look at all that, which transpired in the US in the wake of 11 September. This was a classical example of building own tradition, a nobilitation of patriotism, and the construction of identity around such symbolic signs as the flag and the anthem. These new societies clearly experience the need to create national identity, which they cannot derive from the past since they simply do not have it. They lack some sort of a "battle of Grunwald" or an event with a similar rank. Hence, they are compelled to erect this "past" *ad hoc*. I would not be inclined to say that this is a bad thing. Generally speaking, they find the idea of hierarchising culture strange. Such a society is what it is because it has a certain history and simply has to be accepted as such.

D. Czaja: Nonetheless, it is possible to observe in American culture also other types of a return to the past, this time in a rather more grotesque version. Take the example of the rather comical snobbery for "the old", naturally in its European version. "American" books by Eco or Baudrillard mention all those churches or castles transferred to distant Idaho and there recreated anew brick by brick, as well as other artificial practices of prolonging one's lineage. Naturally, this is not only an American speciality. What are we to think, for instance, about the contemporary phenomenon – actually, a fashion – for an artificial resurrection of the past, a costume-like enlivening of memory? You mentioned a moment ago the battle of Grunwald, which reminds me of a certain amusing newspaper article about the annual recreation of the "battle of Grunwald" on the historical site, involving teams of knights, "our" men and the enemy, using swords and lances and engaged in armed skirmishes. Interestingly, the outcome is not historically predetermined. I even recently heard that the Teutonic Knights won [laughter]. How would you assess those returns to the past, the whole process of putting on – literally and metaphorically – someone else's costume? Just how sensible is this theatricalisation of memory, which some might find funny and others – grotesque? Do such journeys into the past actually assist in regaining memory?

R. Kapuściński: I would say that as long as people are not killing or setting fire to each other...



Africa. Photo: Ryszard Kapuściński

D. Czaja: ... then let them play...

R. Kapuściński: Yes, let them play. I, theretofore, would not perceive anything blameworthy in those phenomena. Naturally, this is connected with the fact that we are living in a world of intensively functioning mass culture and, as result, a world of enormous deposits of kitsch, which has already become a permanent element of culture. Some might find this to their liking, while others might not; these mass culture phenomena can be ignored or criticized but they shall objectively exist. Willingly or not, we are compelled to participate in this process.

Z. Benedyktowicz: My question about American culture has also a second hidden agenda. Naturally, we know enough about American pop culture and numerous phenomena, including embarrassing ones, from this particular domain. On the other hand, if we inquire about the best chairs of classical philology in the world then it turns out that, as Zygmunt Kubiak said during a discussion held by our editorial board, ancient Greek studies flourish best at Harvard...

R. Kapuściński: It must be kept in mind that American society is highly diversified. The campus phenomenon takes place also in this world. But this is a closed enclave, almost totally isolated from society. It is, and is not, America. True, in each academic domain you encounter all: means, ambition and talent. These people are intentionally drawn there and enjoy excellently organized work. Such campuses represent the highest possible level. The whole problem consists of the fact that they exert but a slight impact on the rest of the country. This is also the reason why I find it difficult to say that all those phenomena are actually "America", just as those who are familiar with Africa find it difficult to use the name: "Africa". "America" and "Africa" are comprised of so many realities simultaneously, so many different worlds, at time highly contradictory, that the application of a single name in order to encompass everything is simply misleading.

Z. Benedyktowicz: I would like to ask about yet another detail, closely connected with historical trauma and ways of overcoming this sort of memory. In his review of *Rondo de Gaulle'a*, a book by Olga Stanisławska, Jacek Ołędzki wrote about an issue strange for the European: African museums, even those focused on colonialism, lack martyrological memory. In other words, the strong presence of the cult of ancestors seems to have replaced remembrance, that specific process of concentrating on the painful past so familiar to us from personal experience. Is this really the case?

R. Kapuściński: Let us start from the fact that there are no European-style museums in Africa. They are museums only because that is their name and they do not display anything of special importance. No such institutions exist. Local culture and tradition lack a remembrance site of the "here men were shot, there they were

hanged..." sort. Everything is forgotten. Something quite different is at stake, and this is a model of culture totally different from its European counterpart. Start with the fact that the dead must be immediately buried. The first reaction is to instantly inter the person who died or had been killed. There is no funeral ceremony or preparations of the sort known to us...

This fact is also connected with a totally different attitude to time, its treatment and experiencing. If an ancestor is recalled then not as a martyr but because he is still alive, participates in the life of the community by giving advice, metes punishment or reprimands; in a word, he remains next to, and together with us. Significantly, such ancestors are buried in the direct proximity of the homestead. Numerous graves are located next to homes and often the living walk over them. The ancestor seems to have departed but he remains an extremely ambivalent figure. It is impossible to totally forget him because he continues to function. Illness among the living could be a sign that we have neglected some of our duties *vis a vis* the ancestor, who in this way reminds us that he still exists.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Perhaps this awareness that ancestors continue to accompany us does not generate martyrological remembrance and cultural martyrdom?

R. Kapuściński: Yes, because belief in the presence of the deceased is extremely strong. This holds true not only for African religions. Such a conviction about the return of the dead is a constant component of numerous religions in which the boundary between life and death is never final or total. Such an approach remains so absolutely at odds with our culture in which death is a terrible caesura. There it is fluent reality. Consequently, despair is also dissimilar and extremely theatrical, since basically death is something quite natural. I always experienced this as a problem on assorted African frontlines. Sometimes, accompanying these men I realised that they were facing certain death. They, on the other hand, treated it as something normal; quite simply: someone dies. The relation between the living and the dead differs. This is a positive philosophy inasmuch as death does not produce such a terrible gap in the world around us. It is not horrendous tragedy or insufferable pain.

Remember that the average African woman used to give birth to twenty children and that throughout the whole childbearing stage in her life she produced a child year after year. Out of this total some five children survived, quite a large number. If, therefore, a woman buries her children each year her attitude towards death is totally dissimilar to ours. She lives and simply gives birth to successive offspring. The relation towards death and life is totally different. In certain Latin American countries I often accompanied groups of Indians. In Bolivia or Peru, I would suddenly see a father carrying a small coffin made of plain boards to be buried in a cemetery high in the mountains. A thing quite inconceivable in

Poland, but understandable within the rules of local culture.

“I shall never finish this book!”

Z. Benedyktowicz: I have the impression that so far we have said too little about the book you are now writing: *Podróże z Herodotem*. Here are a few details. I know that the book, albeit with a famous ancient historian in the background, originates from individual, private memory ...

R. Kapuściński: ... both mine and his. To a certain extent this is a highly autobiographical book based on authentic experiences. Everything started when in 1956 I was presented with the idea - an exercise of sorts - of a voyage to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Naturally, it accompanied me all over the world although not always. Now, years later, I read Herodotus anew. But this is exactly what happens with a book - obviously, if it is good and outstanding. It turns out that each time we read it as if it was new. The extraordinary feature of a great book is the fact that it contains many books, or rather their endless number. One could describe it as multi-text. The extraction of those assorted texts depends on when we read the book, in what sort of circumstances, mood, and situation, and what we seek in it at the given moment.

Summing up: I regard Herodotus to be a teacher of sorts, who taught me perception of the world as well as an attitude towards others and different cultures. After all, he was the first globalist, the first to understand that in order to comprehend one's culture it is necessary to become acquainted with others, since the essence of our culture is reflected only in the latter. This is the reason

why he travelled across the world, attempting to render the Greeks aware of the nature of their culture when facing other cultures.

Z. Benedyktowicz: Thanking you for accepting the invitation of our editorial board and for the stimulating conversation I ask once again: when can we expect your book to be published?

R. Kapuściński: Without disclosing too much I would like to add that this book has produced grave problems. I chiefly have in mind the way in which I should control the entire classical material. After all, there recently took place a significant breakthrough in historical research, and in the past years we have all witnessed a great revolution in this domain. Consequently, unruffled traditional science about antiquity is starting to become somewhat part of the past. There exists a vast new literature on the topic, with which I am making my very first acquaintance. Since the whole time I have maintained contacts with my friends, experts on antiquity, they assist me by proposing various interesting titles and urge: “Look, this could be useful, and you must read this or that”, to which I respond: “I shall never finish writing this book!”. Naturally, the proposed studies are extremely interesting and I eagerly study them since they recommend is an entirely new approach to history, extremely vital and in accord with novel tendencies described as postmodern. Consequently, there is no way out: this *Herodotus* is still growing.

Arrangement of discussion

Dariusz Czaja

The editors would like to thank the author and Ms. Iza Wojciechowska for the photographs and cooperation.



The “Province” from an Anthropological Viewpoint. Reflections from the Perspective of the Dilemmas of Cultural Communication

The dilemmas of cultural communication appearing within the context of deliberations on the province must be additionally explained by resorting to a characteristic of the context surrounding this particular category.

In numerous convictions and expectations “the province” is associated with folk qualities or is an autonomous reality contrasted with the “centre”. According to such opinions, provincial and folk space contains truths of life, ethical values, and an authentic experiencing of the world, which can be juxtaposed with illusion, falsehood, and the superficiality of experiences offered by the contemporary, global manner of communication. Another prevailing conviction claims that even if those positive values had been already composed in a certain manner and participate in new contexts they still remain attractive for social dialogue.

On the other hand, folk qualities as a derivative of the province produce today ambivalent attitudes even among experts on folklore and folk art, ethnographers and anthropologists.

The conceits: “folk qualities”, “folk culture”, and “provincial culture” are applied in assorted meanings and upon different levels of interpretation. Since mention is made of a special reality composed of behaviour, values, and ideas as well as their material dimensions, points of view are easily confused owing to the differently understood ontological status of this sort of culture. A relativisation of world outlooks and manners of using descriptive categories in social dialogue results in paradoxes and dilemmas that appear to be irremovable from the contemporary reception of the world of culture.

Upon the level of description and scientific (research) interpretations it is said that:

1. The class definition of folk culture has been rejected already long ago. In its contemporary form folk culture is an attribute neither of the peasantry nor

even of the inhabitants of villages nor a yet differently comprehended province. It appears, as a rule, in the form of cultures accompanied by an adjective (such as: suburban, corporative, local, regional, or others). After all, in order to be able to speak about such culture it suffices to think about social or symbolic reality as long as it meets the need for emotional solidarity, is a framework of joint convictions, and assists in the discovery of a feeling of identity in assorted lifestyles.

2. For years folk culture known from ethnographic descriptions has not existed as an autonomous functional entity containing concurrence between the type of the economy, material cultural endowment, type of social organization and the religious and mythical-magical world outlook. In this sense, folk culture is only a reconstructed historical model, and in such a form it is of use for regionalists as an historical context in interpretations or quests for local originality.

3. At present, it is much better to speak about “provincial culture” as a qualitatively diverse reality produced by various elements of assorted former cultural entities (including folk ones) but composed differently. This new whole is extra-technological and consists of mental structures often expressed in identical rituals and customs but lacking mythical and magical senses; consequently, they become an eclectic mixture of ceremonies possessing new costumes and often banalised meanings. This is the opinion of an expert on folklore engaged in observing so-called new folklore (Kowalski 2004: 156-158).

4. Provincial culture is a variant of multi-form contemporary culture. The latter is universal, technicised, and can be variously rendered ideological, variable, and multi-value. It is the scene of a game and an exchange of values entailing the emergence of numerous returns and transformations. This nature of contemporary culture is the reason why each element or variant can easily become its magical, i.e. provincial version (even if only due to changing fashion), although there also occur returns to the centre of life in a reconstructed or partial form.

5. Contemporary so-called postmodern stands permit a multiplicity of views of the world, treating them all as enjoying equal rights. A frequent symptom of the present-day way of experiencing the world is once again a quest for the exotic, truth, authenticity, and profundity; such declarations are considered suspicious and beyond deeply justified convictions. Is it, however, possible to refuse us, contemporary men, the ability of experiencing the metaphysical nature of the world, or is metaphysics finally dead? Such questions too can be provoked by reflections on the province.

Within the context of the above-mentioned theses the province and its representations – folk qualities – occur in several ways of deciphering culture texts. They could include:

1. interpretation meta-texts. In those cases, folk qualities and provincialism refer to values and ideas;

2. folklorism – brings to mind folk and amateur art and practiced anew folk customs, the stage, commercialism, agricultural tourism and similar ventures;

3. folk culture comprehended as a model of historical social and cultural reality, the outcome of studies but also of scientific creation;

4. counter-culture (alternative cultures) – reaching for the resources of folk qualities and provincialism in order to propagate certain lifestyles, the theatre, and forms of expression as ideological protest against technicised life deprived of spiritual qualities;

5. ideas and practices of regionalism, propagating the portative slogan of so-called small homelands. In those instances, folk culture provides signs of affiliation and identity despite the fact that the small homeland is an anthropological (literary and sociological) hypostasis and not reality.

In such an application one could say about folk culture and its participation in provincial culture that:

1. it belongs only partly to the contemporary rural environment,

2. the environment of provincial culture (space and society) is differentiated due to the type of consciousness, and thus organized differently than has been described by researchers dealing in the past with folk culture,

3. it is a created, mythicized vision of the world without any dark sides,

4. as a lifestyle and manner of thinking it belongs not only to rural space but cultivates its ideal vision in different surroundings,

5. as a scientific meta-text it has been created anew and belongs to the dictionary of interpretations.

The conclusions are as follows:

Folk culture is more myth than reality. It is a collective story about the past moulding certain world outlook spheres. It can be also the foundation and value of critical assessments of contemporary behaviour. Convictions about the natural character of folk culture and the province also refer, as is always the case in history, to contemporaneity, and are used within it (politics, culture, the regionalist movement). Nonetheless, it is not folk culture in the traditional meaning of the word. New folk culture, the sort that the province requires, mixes tradition and knowledge. History, literature, and ethnography appear on the level of usage and common narration. It is, after all, easy to read a book and refer to an expert who will say what is folk and characteristic for a given region. This sort of application is dominated by the local, integrating and identity-oriented dimension. Its cultural expressions are carnivals, holidays, festivals, fairs, regional lessons, agricultural tourism, etc.

An anthropologist of culture observing these issues, familiar with their nature and expert regarding

meta-textual descriptions, becomes embroiled, together with a trained ethnographer, in dilemmas of social participation. Here, the anticipations of local communities entitled to raise their provincialism to the rank of essential values are focused on the authority of science and institutions traditionally regarded as a source of knowledge. This is at odds with the ironic postulates formulated by anthropology in relation to the description of reality. The anthropologist would prefer to stand to the side and observe spontaneously occurring processes. It has to be said outright, however, that today spontaneity is constant communication and exchange.

On the present-day level of social awareness the scholar cannot avoid questions or refuse to render assistance in the emergence of new forms of using folk culture. The province is not cut off from information, but takes part in global communication according to the same principles as an anthropologist of culture. Let us thus draw a suitable conclusion: we all create mythicized, imaginary realities, with some of us doing this in the province and others about the province. Such is the plight of the contemporary humanities.

The above theses can be illustrated by a *sui generis* interpretation proposed in the title and already partly presented. Undoubtedly, the issue at stake is multi-dimensional. The province remains an important

object of studies pursued by anthropology when we treat the topic realistically; in a metaphorical and conceptual sense the province is an interpretation category. It is also a figure of thought or a stereotype in the catalogue of the concepts of common knowledge. The use of a concept in assorted contexts and discourses grants it meanings, upon which a discussion should cast light. It is thus worth conducting if only an approximate analysis of the semantic field of the incriminated concept and thus demonstrate what sort of functions it fulfils in language and culture.

I shall carry out an analysis of the select vocabulary comprising the semantic field of the concept of the "province" by resorting to my research and linguistic experience. In this fashion, the lexicon used in the analysis will remain highly incomplete, not to say arbitrary, just as in the case of every individual reception of reality.

What is my intention?

This is what Regine Robin wrote: a search for the meaning of the text, sentence, and expression calls for certain work with the text, an ostensible configuration of the continuum and order of the statement so as to arrange it anew and render it a significant legibility [...] to search for the meaning of the word denotes an analysis of all its applications or contexts ... (Robin 1980: 252).

The effectiveness of this method in anthropological interpretations has been already shown in reference to a



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literary text submerged in ethnographic detail. I have in mind an analysis of *Konopielka* by E. Redliński (Galasińska 1989) as well as a scientific publication by an historian treating sources from a Polonocentric viewpoint

(Robotycki 1995). Jędrzej Bartmiński made fullest use of this method for other purposes in his ethno-linguistic dictionary (Bartmiński 1996, 1999).

The essence of the method in question is the imposition upon the texts of three networks of relations: the network of definitions corresponding to the semantic function, the network of thematic or conceptual connections delineating the association group (i.e. positive solutions) and oppositions (negative connections), and the verbal network indicating the functions of someone or "functions on". While determining the dominant (core) of the field there comes into being a collection of expressions identifying the latter. The use of the above-mentioned networks consists of discovering relations amidst words comprising the field.

In the case of the dominant "province" I acted in the following manner: from the open set, i.e. representations of styles of linguistic statements (I took into account literature, science, the essay, and the Polish vernacular) I selected examples of definitions, the usage of words, and descriptions of activities connected with the concept of the "province". This provided a barely approximate structure of the field, but sufficient for my initial recognition. (A further part of the argument will demonstrate the sort of texts I used while seeking the context of application; it also contains references to pertinent literature).

In this manner, the positive "province" (+) entails:

- associations with: Nature, tranquillity, calmness, order, the "small homeland",
- distinguishing features expressed by adjectives telling us that it is local, familiar, close, unambiguous,
- it is evaluated as noble simplicity, the prime fount, an observation point and an ethical assessment of collective life,

– it (its essence) is expressed in a calm lifestyle, a certain manner of perceiving the world, and the predominance of positive social relations, while as a place of residence it is an environment endowed with a large social capital owing to the afore-mentioned local qualities.

The opposite province (-) is:

– a centre, a town, *grand monde*, and Warsaw, characterised as alien from the viewpoint of the province, chaotic, inimical, and incomprehensible.

Equivalents deprecating (-) the province from the point of view of the centre include such expressions as:

– country bumpkin, "villager", simpleton, brute, peasant, "mohair" (wearer of a mohair beret), folklore, "the sticks", ignoramus. They characterise a state of backwardness, a lack of understanding for the spirit of the time and new perspectives, primitive pettiness and a quarrelsome nature.

In both the positive and negative valorisation of elements of the semantic field of the category of "the province" there additionally appears the problem of language and dialect, recognisable as a feature or pragmatics.

The dialect can be a positive feature: as the language used at home or the sign of a group;

– with a negative sign it can be classified as an opposition: the sign of unskilful or impaired speech – the pragmatics of statements.

Already such initial recognition shows that when we say: "province" we are dealing not only with a category of linguistic description but also with anthropological and ethno-linguistic reality (both words conceal social meanings and collective conceits). From this point of view, the province can become the object of observation and anthropological, sociological or historical studies. It should be kept in mind, however, that we are speaking about something that lies simultaneously in the domain of language and culture. In this sketch I am interested primarily in all possible aspects and types of reflections about the province that appear in anthropological texts, studies on folklore, anthropologising sociology, and the belles lettres (regardless of the way in which we shall conceive the latter). I shall thus indicate further examples of the range and manner of writing about the province originating from the earlier mentioned domain of reflections pursued by the humanities. By referring only to particular works I treat them as an illustration of the diversity of the issues under examination.

The province is thus depicted as a place of residence albeit possessing special conditions. It is anthropological space domesticated by constant symbolic valorisation and deciphering, and spans from the cosmological dimension to folklore. This is the way it was described by anthropologists and ethnographers (Benedyktow-

icz 1992, 2007; Czaja 2007), folklorists (Bartmiński 1990), and men of letters (Vincenz 1980).

Such a place of residence can also become the site of individual withdrawal or a collective demonstration of certain social stands connected with social criticism known as anti-globalism. In those cases, living in the province is a conscious choice of life in alternative communities, often inclined towards specific forms of creativity and expression (Sztandara 2001).

Problems relating to, and rhetoric making use of the prime category of our reflections are also to be discovered in texts on the so-called small homeland. Here, the province is connected with such categories as tradition, invented tradition, folklore, and history. All serve the construction (and according to the local population - the recreation) of local "genuine" tradition. Convictions about the truth contained in folklore and regional history stem from a certain categorical axiological stand generating tradition, the latter being nothing else than the past brought up to date. In this case, tradition is also a specific comprehension of time and chronology. These dimensions are either downplayed or not noticed as essential. I deliberated on them upon numerous occasions (see: Robotycki 1998). It is worth drawing attention to the fact that authors writing about local history are to be encountered in almost every locality. They treat questions of chronology in assorted ways, from historical attempts, i.e. critical precision, to freedom of operating with facts. I found such examples in Poronin (Bafia, Nocoń 2004), Jurgów (Ciągwa 1996), Legnica (Urbański, no year of publication), Dobrocice (Wrońscy 2007), Bejsce (Bajka 1994), Wójcin (Wilczyński 1995), Brzesko (Wyczęsany 2000), Iwanowice (Miska 1993) and many other localities. I cite only several examples from my collection of local monographs.

What about the "small homeland"? This term, travestied in daily language and once applied by Stanisław Ossowski (private homeland) and Stanisław Vincenz (small homeland), is today regarded as a real being. Meanwhile, in the case of both authors it was a spatial correlate of the imaginary world, a function of a subjective, emotional perception of reality. Currently, use is made of increasingly distant associations. In the semantic relation "the small homeland": space and pragmatics, distinctly shows a preference for real space (area). The cultural effect of changing meanings in the lexical domain of the "province" is visible in collective activities. We know of numerous socio-technical operations intent on rendering the place of residence a realistically comprehended homeland. Literature on this topic is enormous. Here, works by Wojciech Łukowski (2002) and Roch Sulima (2001) are of importance for describing the phenomenon, and examples of an analysis of literature include a study about the nostalgic comprehension of the category of the "homeland" in literary essays (Olejniczak 1992).



Oblegorek

Within the range of semantic references to the category of the "province" a considerable role is played by the conviction that characteristic features include a specific lifestyle and type of interaction. It has already become an historical truth that anthropology and sociology mention a differentiation of the social environment into *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, introduced by Ferdinand Tönnies. Community is the structural and interactive feature of the province. Observations inspired by this classical differentiation are encountered among such ethnographically oriented anthropologists as K. Górny and M. Marczyk (Górny 2003, Górny, Marczyk 2003). The province organized in accordance with the mentioned principles should have at its disposal considerable social capital – a sociological category known from the contemporary dictionary of the social sciences (Lewenstein 2006).

The province is the space of social dialogue and possible conflicts but to an equal measure of cooperation. Each of those forms is familiar to social researchers. In contemporary Polish society, laboriously building its civic links, the local social debate is particularly important and desirable. This fact could not have evaded the attention of researchers studying the life of local communities. By way of example, local debates were observed by A. Malewska-Szałygin (2002), the extra-legal manner of resolving inner rural conflicts was described by M. Magoska

(1991), and ethical aspects connected with the identity of minorities and local communities were studied at the Department of Social Anthropology in the Institute of Sociology at the Jagiellonian University (Flis 2004). These sociological publications demonstrate that the situation of the province is subjected to changes. The term appears more rarely in assorted publications, where its place is taken by the concept of "locality", of a postmodern provenance. This is not solely the question of a fashionable term. If concepts denote, then there must have occurred a qualitative change of social reality. Dialogue and debate are forms of an interaction of a democratic society organized differently than the traditional province. Researchers have been observing transformations for a long time

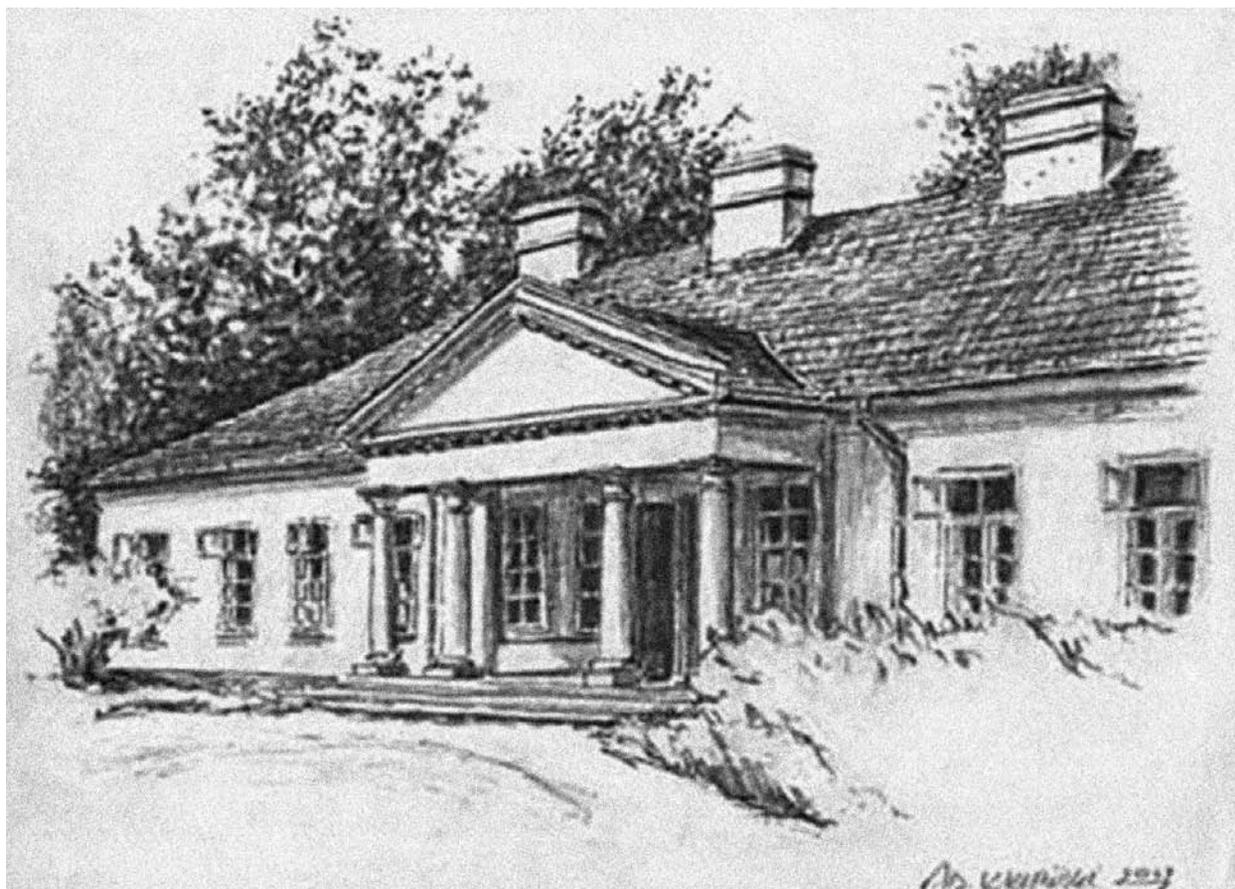
now and pondering the nature of the contemporary local community and culture. Much attention has been devoted to these topics by Joanna Kurczewska and her team. In this case, sociological answers are extremely significant. Former traditional ethnographic knowledge is no longer sufficient. Joint reflections pursued by cultural sociology and anthropology offer new and greatly interesting results, as testified by two volumes of studies edited by Joanna Kurczewska on assorted aspects of the local (Kurczewska 2004, 2006).

The traditionally ethnographic and anthropological range of interests focused on the province includes folk religiosity. We come across its collective expression in recurring miracles inspiring a spontaneous establishment of pilgrimage sites. At the same time, already known sites do not vanish together with their accompanying fairground art and religious kitsch. An excellent example is the dynamically developing centre in Licheń. In a wider dimension, these phenomena became part of the iconic space of the province, creating its repeatable or unique atmosphere. This is the reason why the anthropologist is interested in celebrations of the day of the patron saint of a local church and the accompanying fair as well as their contemporary variants: work connected with servicing tourists and summer vacationers staying on suitably adapted farms (agricultural tourism), the outfitting of summer

holiday locations, open-air markets, and local gastronomy. Here are several examples of anthropological studies developing the presented motifs.

Much is already known, since a lot has been written, about miracles witnessed from time to time in assorted localities in Poland. For years we have been hearing about Oława, Okunin, Radomin, Leżajsk, Lublin and other sites (Czachowski 2003). Art and trade accompanying the *sacrum* have been discussed by, for example, P. Kowalski (2004), while the iconosphere of the province, the local church patron's day, and summer vacation localities have been studied in interesting publications by young sociologists from Toruń (Olechnicki 2003). We are also familiar with sketches dealing with transformations of the visual surrounding of a small town (Witkowska, Nowina-Sroczyńska 1998) and contemporary kitsch (Fiderkiewicz 2006).

Above, I presented the scientific aspect of the comprehension of the category of the "province". Once again, I draw attention to the fact that present-day sociology and cultural anthropology use, as has been accentuated, the term "localness" as an equivalent of the category of the "province", stating upon the basis of empirical observations that the former is the best evocation of the situation of contemporary Polish society. The anthropological viewpoint, however, encompasses not merely ethnographic expressions of social life, and "localness" does



Lusławice

not exhaust the anthropological potential. The anthropologist is interested also in cultural expression achieved by means of colloquiality and assorted forms of art. In such dimensions, the "province" assumes the character of a symbolic gesture, a metaphor, and other possible meanings in the course of discourses of this sort.

Recall that in the past the "nation" offered a residence in the province to its men of merit (citizens, heroes) as evidence of recognition of their accomplishments. In doing so, it granted them a symbolic place of rest and social respect. This is the anthropological interpretation of the residence in Sulejówek granted to Józef Piłsudski, in Kaźna Dolna – to Ignacy Paderewski, in Polanka – to Władysław Haller, in Żarnowiec near Jasło – to Maria Konopnicka, and in Oblęgorek – to Henryk Sienkiewicz. The manor house presented as a collective symbolic gesture is comprehensible within the context of Polish tradition. Polish history and culture were to a great degree rustic. Former magnate residences (and frequently those of the gentry) acted as centres of art and culture. Moreover, land ownership was highly regarded. After all, it is said that the Polish manor, conceived as an institution, preserved national ethos throughout years of partition-era servitude (Gogut 1990, Leśniakowska 1996). National heroes who realised ethical values met group expectations.

The province conceived as a place of creative work, an observation point and one of moral assessments is still something else. In the tradition of most recent Polish culture it is possible to list creatively active persons choosing to stay in the province. Many of them, well educated, in this manner implemented their ideological or artistic programme. Others discovered in the province a suitable distance towards the world of culture necessary for their creative pursuits, while still others returned to their roots. The motives were always numerous. By way of example, let us mention Drohobycz and B. Schulz, Krzywórnica and S. Vincenz, Stawisko and J. Iwaszkiewicz, Kazimierz Dolny and M. Kuncewiczowa, Górki Wielkie and Z. Kossak-Szczucka, Skoczów and G. Morcinek,

Zegrzynek and J. Szaniawski, Gorzeń Górny and E. Zegadłowicz,

Szczawnica and J. Wiktor, and Wołowice and A. Stasiuk.

If we add the fact that avant-garde theatre companies also seek expression and stimulus in the province (the "Gardzienice" Theatre association, the Węgajty Theatre, the Borderland Foundation in Sejny, the Wierszalin Theatre, etc.), and that the Krzysztof Penderecki residence consists of a magnificent manor and park in Lusławice then it becomes obvious that the province can be a lifestyle from which it is not that far to the "grand world" of high culture.

Authors who in a programme-like manner live in the province treating it as a *sui generis* observation point do not lose contact with high culture.

After all, their work is not provincial but pertains to every important existential and collective problem. Whenever a place is specifically manifested in the creative *oeuvre* it is possible to decipher this situation as a stunt thanks to which the authors situate themselves outside or above the presented world. In literature, the "province" is often an observation point, a metaphor of the axiological order, a model of the world and the cosmos. We also come across a metonymy of the "province" – the house as moral order, a world of values and memory. Nonetheless, the province does not lack images dominated by a tendency to stifle, a feeling of being entrapped, group pressure, as well as a prevailing absence of all hope.

It is worth drawing attention to yet another literary aspect of the province. I have in mind the so-called rural theme in Polish post-war literature. It exploded in the 1970s, but it had certain antecedents and is connected with the names of renowned authors (J. Kawalec, T. Nowak, M. Pilot, W. Myśliwski, E. Redliński) to be discovered not only on book covers but also on the pages of the interesting periodical "Regiony", issued to the end of the century. This was a forum of authors fascinated with the low and provincial circulation of the word, which they regarded as the important building material of culture. The publication of the periodical involved also folklorists and sociologists (R. Sulima, K. Górski, B. Gołębiowski). In both the literary and analytical work the editorial board pursued a question more extensive than the so-called rural theme, whose "godfather" was for a longer time Henryk Berezka. The editors of "Regiony" were concerned with something more than the place of folk/plebeian qualities in the universe of Polish culture. They understood folk qualities as world outlook structures, as values to be universalised in the difficult process of the peasants gaining a personality at a time when they became fully fledged participants of the cultural dialogue (Zawada 1983 *passim*).

Roch Sulima described this process:

...Among writers of folk genealogy, who settle moral and aesthetic accounts with attained culture (Redliński, Myśliwski, Pilot), the "bottom" once again became a point of reference for evaluations. At the same time, it possesses distinctly expressed social contents and is not a supra-social and supra-historical abstract. Contemporary literary critique and publicistics very often refer to the axiology of the "source", recognising it as a model of not solely name granting operations but predominantly those that explain and assess (Sulima 1982: 102).

This was, therefore, a line of thought different than the above-mentioned tradition of the topos of the province in literature. Nor was it the folklore motif present in the history of Polish culture starting with Romanticism.

"Province" has a number of names. Whenever it was mentioned in mythicised history, in literature mythical by its very nature, in an essay and in science I used an

anthropological yardstick, which showed that we are dealing with ambivalent reality and that it is impossible to apply categorical views. I spoke about it in the past tense, indicating various transformations in knowledge and attitudes towards the province. One could say that old cultural habits urge us to see the province in a manner indicated by the semantic analysis conducted at the onset. Apparently, even language does not keep up with changes.

Surrounding contemporaneity introduces amendments into this manner of seeing and experiencing reality. Technology has reduced the time needed for overcoming distance, and communication has made it possible to take part in collective life and to benefit from science and information regardless of the place of residence (TV, Internet, etc.). Even in the so-called province there function structures and institutions reducing the feeling of being cut off from the world. The example of the commune of Tyczyn near Rzeszów and the local school of higher learning is sufficient proof of how the comprehension of the "province" can alter. The globalisation of numerous domains of cultural life has rendered universal styles of daily life realised in each social stratum and place of residence.

Apart from the regions of poverty that comprise a separate problem, models of life became extremely democratised and similar. At times, they have turned into caricatures. but this is already a separate question from the borderland of anthropology and the world of values.

Participation in a differently organised society, in a situation of constant exchange and communication, inclines us towards changing intellectual categories describing and interpreting reality; hence the mentioned category of "localness" ousts the former comprehension of the province and provincialism.

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The Paradox of the Province

A separate cosmos. A closed world. A theatre of recurring gestures and behaviour. Always the same actors. Small town residents, stolid and representing banal ordinariness. The special protagonists include the mayor, the teacher, the priest, the physician and the hairdresser. The local mad woman and the local beauty. Unruly youngsters marking their presence in a highly intense manner. Only sometimes does something unexpected take place within this space of routine and stultifying predictability. The Duce will appear with an entourage of soldiers, and a procession brandishing flags will march down the streets. Exclamations will be heard, and songs will be performed. The local hotel will welcome a sheik accompanied by a large group of heavily veiled women. A mad motorcyclist will rush down the street. The worthy will experience a miracle: a white bull suddenly appearing in the midst of the town buildings... .

Naturally, these are only snatches of recalled fragments of Federico Fellini's motion picture *Amarcord*. The world depicted therein is one of a typical small provincial town in pre-war Italy, almost an archetype of the province. Concurring opinions declare that *Amarcord* is one of the most beautiful and poignant portrayals of provincial life in the history of the cinema. An openly nostalgic portrait. After all, this is a story about a world that has become part of the past. Crumbs of bygone reality extracted from memory. Fragments of a broken looking glass. Recall that in the local dialect the word: *amarcord* means: "I remember". It is not my intention, however, to speak about the film as such although it will reappear in our reflections as a highly instructive example. I would, however, like to consider its origin and ask what sort of experience of such a world rendered possible this moving artistic creation. In other words: I would like to reconstruct the conditions that made possible its origin.

1

Fellini is the author of an important but rather little known publication:

Il mio paese, issued in 1967, i.e. before the making of *Amarcord* (1973), as part of a small collection of the director's texts pertaining to his birthplace, the seaside town of Rimini. This nostalgic reminiscence is by no means sentimental. It is a journey to the sources of memory, fascinating remarks made years later. On the one hand, they appear to be essential for comprehending Fellini's creative path and, on the other hand, they constitute captivating material for delving into the phenomenon of the province.

The fragments cited further in this article have been taken from the English language version not only because the Italian original was unavailable¹ but also for another, more basic reason. The English translation was published in the excellent periodical

"Aperture" dealing with photography. The brilliant photographs of Rimini taken by Marco Pesaresi are an integral part of the text. It is worth stressing that they originate from 1996 and document the daily of life of the small town, which Fellini left before the war. The pictures are consistently maintained in a nostalgic-fun aura, familiar from Fellini's films: an empty wintertime beach, snow along the coast, a scene from a street festivity known as Gradisca and commemorating a figure of importance in *Amarcord*, a frame from a Good Friday procession. Gravity alongside entertainment, the holy next to the ludic or the perverse *profanum*. This is the reason why despite a considerable difference in time texts about the pre-war past and contemporary photographs easily establish an intimate dialogue. Let us then take a closer look at several interesting passages:

Last night I dreamed of the port in Rimini. A port open towards the green waves of the sea as menacing as undulating grasses along which low-slung clouds rushed, coming near to its surface,

Rimini: what is it? It is the dimension of memory (amidst other questions: made-belief, adulterous, miserable memory) on which I deliberated for so long that it started to trouble me.

(...) I think about Rimini, a word made of sticks and soldiers in trenches. I cannot render it objective. Rimini: an absurd story, complex, formidable and tender, with its characteristic great breath and empty, open sea. There, nostalgia became purer, particularly the wintry sea, the white surf and the fierce wind, just the way I remembered it for the first time.²

This is the beginning of a journey into the past, to a land that no longer exists. Fellini recalled the people, fragrances, and colours that created his province:

In the evenings we would take walks by the sea, melting in the wintry mists of Rimini: pulled down shutters and closed boarding houses, deep silence and the murmur of the sea.

In the summer, just to annoy couples making love behind the boats, we would quickly undress and, na-

ked, appear suddenly to ask the man concealed behind a boat: "Sorry, what's the time?"

(Important - in Rimini the difference between the seasons is immense. This is a change of substance, not merely meteorological, as in other towns. In other words, there are two completely different Riminis).³

Fellini evoked the world of his childhood, confronting it with present-day Rimini. Naturally, he no longer discovered the allure of days bygone. On the other hand, he did not complain, but simply registered certain obvious facts. Rimini was no longer a godforsaken small town from the past, a place where everyone knew each other, a town submerged in darkness and mist, with the illuminated Grand Hotel resembling a multi-storey pyramid. Today's Rimini is a modern cosmopolitan resort.

The Rimini that I see now is endless. In the past, the town was surrounded by kilometres of darkness, and the road along the coast was never used. The only spots to be seen were ghastly fascist buildings or summertime camping sites (...). Now, darkness is no more. Instead, we have 15 kilometres of nightclubs and glistening neon lights as well as a never-ending procession of shiny cars, a Milky Way of sorts, made of headlights. Lights are all around: night has vanished, fled to the sky and the sea.⁴

Fellini constructed his text around the "now"–"then" vertical axis. I repeat, however, that this is by no

means a retrospective utopia. Naturally, he mourned the irrecoverable departure of that world, "his" world, but he did not sob over spilt milk. He grieved over a loss, but without historical gestures, somewhat in the spirit of Dylan's refrain: "The times, they are a-changing". Note a characteristic feature: the contours of the province become distinctive only from a certain distance, as if time possessed crystallising properties, rejected secondary traits, and reduced the traits of that world to essential properties. The temporal distance becomes a condition for comprehension.

2

At times, texts become engrossed in conversation, although they may be unaware of this fact. This is precisely the case when alongside Fellini's confession one places *Prowincja*, a text by Sławomir Mrożek. The heart of the matter does not lie in the fact that Mrożek actually recalled Fellini, and did so already in the opening sentence, but in the fact that the remarks made by both authors about the phenomenon of the province brilliantly supplement each other. The brief and, let it be said at the onset, sparkling text by Mrożek is an exemplary phenomenology of the province. In it, the author extracted that, which everyone probably feels and sees but is not necessarily capable of naming. Mrożek placed emphasis on the essential and inalienable features of



Rimini. Photo: © Marco Pesaresi, after: "Aperture", no. 172/2003



Rimini. Photo: © Marco Pesaresi, after: "Aperture", no. 172/2003

the province. In doing so, he disclosed that, which renders the province provincial and without which it could not be what it is. This is one of those texts that, albeit operating with language from the antipodes of so-called scientific cognition (whatever that may mean), possess an unattainable cognitive dimension. If one were to rid oneself for a single moment of the superior conviction that only science is capable of discovering essential truths, then one could see in these comments a magnificent, convincing, and, in my opinion, extremely apt description of the very phenomenon of the province perceived in all its complexity and dynamics. More, this is a depiction that one would seek in vain in analyses bearing the stamp of scientific qualities.

True, Mrożek did not conduct onerous and years-long studies dealing with the phenomenon in question, nor did he refer – in the fashion of Fellini – to his memory involved in reconstructing a personal paradise lost; nonetheless, from the very onset he reached the very essence of things. Mrożek not only demonstrated the properties of the province, but predominantly accentuated the manner in which it exists. Here, the point of departure is a rather detailed recollection, an entry, a memory tag:

Amarcord – Fellini.

I from Cracow, he from Rimini. I, Mrożek, he, Fellini. Otherwise, everything is the same.

On the assets of the province as a configuration shaping the artist. The clarity of inter-human relations. Proximity. One is in the middle since the province itself is a centre and does not have peripheries. Here it is impossible to be anywhere else than in the centre. Willy-nilly. At the same time: We are here, and over there is the Great World. Where? Everywhere where we are not. Where it is not here. At any rate, far away.

So far that one may only yearn. There is no passage between here and there, neither on land and water nor in the air. Despite the fact that t h e r e it exists. Those from the Metropolis can sometimes visit us in the way angels visit us, the poor people. But we?

Hence, we are in the middle, but this is not the centre of the universe. Proximity, domesticity for better or worse. And condensed and powerful longing.⁵

Keep in mind: the province is a centre, my centre. Further: the province is some sort of a close-by and concrete "here" contrasted with a nondescript "there". The province is, therefore, a relative concept endowed with an extremely interesting characteristic. Despite the fact that this concept is here, palpable and real, once it becomes distant and unattainable it is situated even higher on the scale of reality. Then there is longing, the prime and probably most perceptible and poignant emotion connected with the province. This is probably something more than sheer emotion, a *raison d'être*. Longing is nothing more than a dream

about being somewhere else. If there is anything that the inhabitant of the world of the province knows with unruffled certainty it is the fact that "life is elsewhere", regardless whether that "elsewhere" exists and where it may be situated on a map.

Moreover, Mrozek's remarks about the province evolve into an extremely interesting deliberation about rather curious anthropology:

Meanwhile, every person, whether from the province or not, is a province. The area of each individual consciousness is a province. Wherever man finds himself he always carries with him the borders of his county.

Even in the Metropolis he will not encompass it. There is always that enclosed area, my area, with blurred and vanishing borders, ever fluid and changeable but undeniable. One may describe the geography of such an area, just as it is possible to describe the geography of each province in a geography textbook.

This is an extraordinary observation. Mrozek extracted the phenomenon of the province from physical space that can be cartographically outlined and transferred it into a mental domain. The province ceases being a fragment situated in space. Everyone is a province. Now, the problem no longer entails the place from which one cannot perceive the Centre, but distinctness, singularity, and uniqueness. This space is endowed with less perceptible parameters, but is just as real.

In successive closer observations Mrozek once again changed the perspective. This time, he demon-

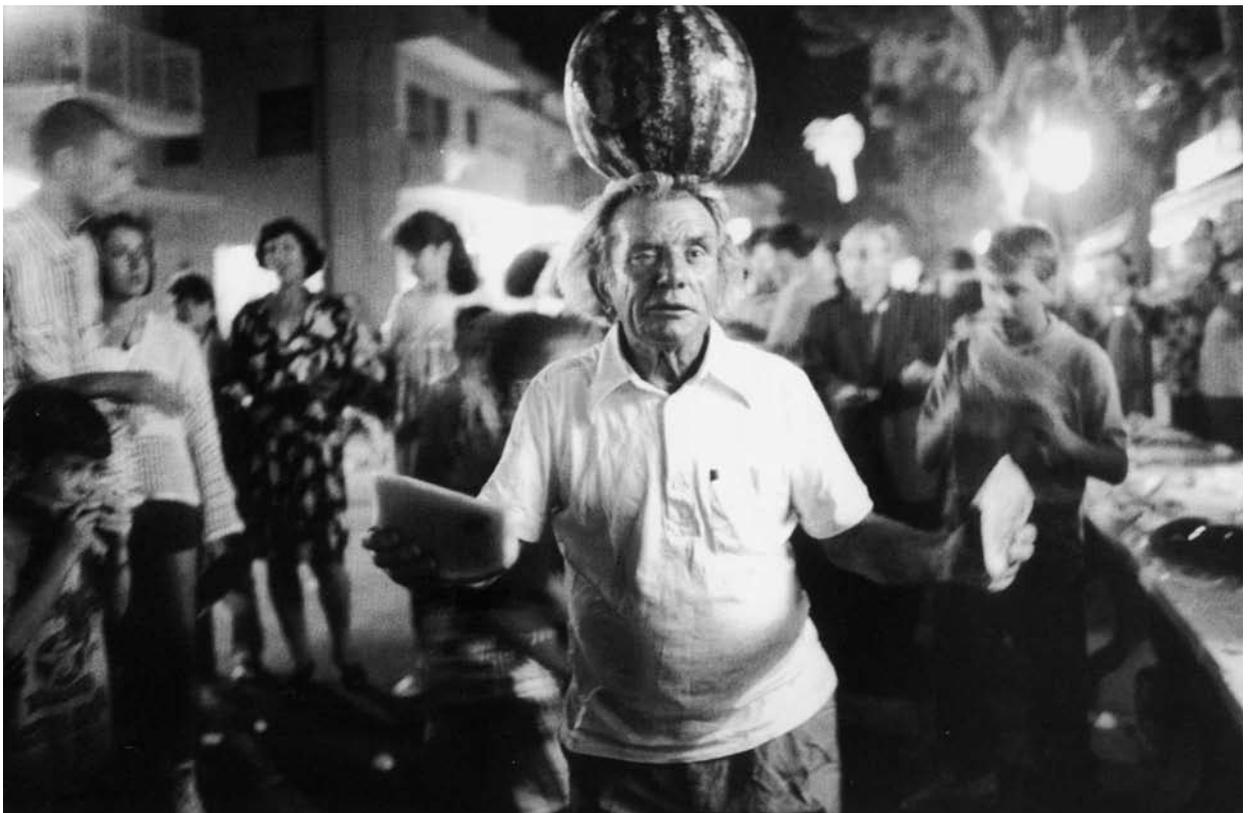
strated what the province could be (is) and the way in which it functions in artistic imagination. Here, there reappeared the thought about the province as a local cosmos with clear-cut borders.

The artist works exclusively - since it is impossible to work in any other way - with the assistances of models. He who comes from the province and is an artist is fortunate.

In the province the restriction of people, places and details, their permanence, albeit relative - since interchangeability and variability are so slow that they produce the impression of stability - render possible concentration, conservation, and contemplation. More, they even force to act in this way. In the Metropolis everything is accidental, hurried, and sporadic and the numbers are overwhelming. Quantity and haste are not the artist's friends. On the other hand, the artist will not come into being if he does not liberate himself from his province.

One hates one's province when one is stuck in it and does everything possible to enter the Great World. In more exact terms: one hates one's provincialism. To change and improve one's fate. Once again, a paradox, as always and everywhere. How little do we take into account the rule that the ultimate effect of our efforts, both individual and collective, is always directly the reverse of the intended. Each thing turns into its contradiction.⁶

Importantly: in his presentation of the province and the latter's connections with creative thought Mrozek is free of all sentimental longing and the temptation of idealisation. His province is by no means some sort of



Rimini. Photo: © Marco Pesaresi, after: "Aperture", no. 172/2003

arcadia or the space of realized utopia. Nor is it a world of fulfilment. On the contrary, the dream about power is to be realized only when the artist frees himself of his province. But he must do so in such a way so as not to abandon it totally.

At this stage we once again return to Fellini because it was he, presumably, whom Mrozek regarded as an artist who in the exemplary and pure manner of a laboratory performed the assigned lesson described by him.

*Fellini would have never created his film Amarcord, a work about his province and about the world, if he had not left the province at some stage. He would have not returned to it, as he did via Amarcord, nor seen it as he actually did, or felt what he felt. I am certain that when he was leaving it he did so "for always", "irreversibly", and only for the sake of the world. He did not expect that he would once again see the province via the world, just as he perceived the world via the province. In all probability, at the time he felt nothing but the wild joy of escaping.*⁷

The province and the world, apparently two sides of the same coin. Naturally, the province gravitates towards the world, and the centre of gravity is on the latter's side. It turns out, however, that the province,

its sources, that, which is most valuable, can be seen only from the outside, the world. This is the titular paradox: the province, its existential meaning and creative force, can be perceived only once we leave it. A paradox that is a personification of a certain durable and, one might say, model-like situation constantly recurring in the history of art.

An extremely similar story and with an identical ending, not to say, moral, was told by Eliade in his insightful exegesis ignoring the well-worn tracks of interpretation and concerning the art of the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Recall: art critics regarded it as strange and paradoxical that Brancusi, a "Carpathian peasant", disclosed his Romanian roots and made creative use of them only after he discovered archaic art, examined in the museums of Paris. In his commentary on Brancusi, Eliade recalled the story of pious rabbi Ayzik from Martin Buber's *Tales of the Hasidim*, which in the summary proposed by the Romanian expert on religion recounts how:

One night, Ayzik, the son of Reb Yekl, dreamed that there was a treasure hidden under the Praga side of the



Rimini. Photo: © Marco Pesaresi, after: "Aperture", no. 172/2003

Warsaw bridge. So he travelled to Warsaw. At the bridge he tried to reach the spot, but a soldier was standing guard there. Ayzik paced back and forth, waiting for the soldier to go away. The soldier meanwhile became aware of Ayzik and asked him what he wanted. Ayzik told him the truth: that he had dreamed about a treasure buried under the bridge. The soldier said, "Don't be a fool. Just because I dreamed about a treasure in the oven at the home of Ayzik, Reb Yekl's son in Cracow, doesn't mean I have to go there". Ayzik promptly turned around and went home. With care and not a little excitement he took his oven apart and behold, he found a treasure that fulfilled his wildest dreams.⁸

Today, uplifting stories with a moral are accepted with understandable distrust. For us, however, the triumphalist note with an existential happy end is not the most essential. Greater importance is attached to another thought, of a cognitive and artistic nature. Let us note that this simple story says something very similar to that which had been formulated by Fellini and Mrożek. That what is most valuable, the centre of our world is always "in the oven" that belongs to each of us. Everyone has his oven. This is the centre, the spot from which we originate. There, "everything" is stored. The paradox, however, consists of the fact that it is necessary to travel beyond "our world", to some sort of a "netherworld" and distant lands in order to be capable of perceiving this life-giving centre of radiation, but now seen from an entirely different perspective. To see it anew. Or simply "to see".

Examined from a certain distance, the reflections pursued by Fellini, Mrożek, and Eliade constitute three different variations concerning the myth of departure, here comprehended in a special manner: not as a story about no-return exile, the trauma of abandoning that, which we hold dearest, the sadness of loss. Here, the myth of departure is allied with the generative myth of the return. It is precisely in this confrontation of contrasts, this ambivalence that – they seem to be saying – the most valuable can come into being and true art could flare up. Along this two-direction path we come across other giants, such as Tadeusz Kantor and his spectacles (*Umarła klasa /The Dead Class/* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*), whose irremovable underpinning is the recalled memory of the site of the childhood, his province. This is only one of many conspicuous examples, all confirming the aptness of recognition.

3

At the end, here is Mrożek once again. Concluding his text he shifted from the level of a description of the role that the province should perform in the work of the artist to more general remarks. In doing so, Mrożek demonstrated the deeply existential dimension of provincialism, of being a man of the province. We thus leave behind the atelier, the stage, and the film set and return to ordinary life and not its artistic counterpart:

Once again about longing, do not make little of longing. Is this not the strongest emotion? Ultimately, only longing and exhaustion remain. A longing with no focus and even with no object, just the very essence of longing.

The province is a school of longing. The best and never forgotten.⁹

As if a distant echo of Fellini, who wrote that nostalgia becomes essential and purer in the province.

According to this interpretation, the inhabitant of the province is simply a different name of the human condition of each one of us regardless of the place of residence. Ultimately, Mrożek's reflection about the province becomes a story about the contemporary Everyman, the spiritual heir of the original Everyman, the Jedermann from the late mediaeval mystery play. The present-day Everyman is a figure with a foundation of longing, whose characteristic mark is a part of the DNA cultural chain distinguishing each one of us.

Note that today longing pursues two contrary directions. Those living in the peripheries address their prayers to the icons of great cities, while those residing in the metropolis long for the secluded tranquility of the provinces. Everyone is not there where he is, and everyone seems to be not quite at home. There is no convincing proof, but we cannot negate the suggestion that it is exactly this dynamic of longings and desires aimed at different directions that seems to be maintaining the world in some sort of equilibrium.

Endnotes

- ¹ F. Fellini, *Il mio paese*, in: *La mia Rimini*, ed. R. Renzi, Bologna 1967.
- ² F. Fellini, *My Rimini*, "Aperture", no. 172: 2003, p. 26.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 31.
- ⁵ S. Mrożek, *Male listy*, Kraków 1982, p. 15.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp. 16-17.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁸ M. Eliade, *Brancusi i mitologia*, transl. D. Czaja, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 3: 1988, pp. 178-179.
- ⁹ Mrożek, op. cit., p. 17. It is surprising to note that the author of the monograph about Fellini comments on one of the most recognisable features of his *oeuvre* in an extremely similar manner: *No one but he, the son of a petite bourgeois family, an arrival from the provinces, growing up in an epoch of sacrifices and restrictions, was capable of comprehending the power of dreaming, longing for another form of life, more beautiful and genuine, a longing for something else. It is this longing - as we found out - that accompanies his path and acts as an impulse for the imagination*, M. Kornatowska, *Fellini*, Warszawa 1972, p. 43.

What ancestor speaks in me? I can't live simultaneously in my head and in my body. That's why I can't be just one person. I can feel within myself countless things at once.

There are no great masters left. That's the real evil of our time. The heart's path is covered in shadow. We must listen to the voices that seem useless in brains full of long sewage pipes of school wall, tarmac and welfare papers. The buzzing of insects must enter. We must fill the eyes and ears of all of us with things that are the beginning of a great dream. Someone must shout that we'll build the pyramids. It doesn't matter if we don't. We must fuel that wish and stretch the corners of the soul like an endless sheet.

If you want the world to go forward, we must hold hands. We must mix the so-called healthy with the so-called sick. You healthy ones! What does your health mean? The eyes of all mankind are looking at the pit into which we are plunging. Freedom is useless if you don't have the courage to look us in the eye, to eat, drink and sleep with us! It's the so-called healthy who have brought the world to the verge of ruin. Man, listen! In you water, fire and then ashes, and the bones in the ashes. The bones and the ashes!

Where am I when I'm not in reality or in my imagination? Here's my new pact: it must be sunny at night and snowy in August. Great things end. Small things endure. Society must become united again instead of so disjointed. Just look at nature and you'll see that life is simple. We must go back to where we were, to the point where we took the wrong turn. We must go back to the main foundations of life without dirtying the water. What kind of world is this if a madman tells you you must be ashamed of yourselves!

[Fragment from *Nostalghia*, a film by Andrei Tarkovsky¹]

These words originate from a speech given by Domenico, one of the protagonists of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalghia*. Actually, I am fascinated by the extraordinary and memorable final image, introduced by Domenico's statement. In his excellent: *What Is Nostalgia?* Leonid Batkin conducted an in-depth and detailed analysis of the film, concluding that the whole film is actually a two-hour long preparation for a single frame shown at the very end. I cannot surmise how this was accomplished, he wrote. Nonetheless, the whole plot is resolved in this astonishing drawn-out take. I am ready to explain the whole film as a two-hour long preparation for a single frame that is not simply the last but prime and essential. All that which appeared to be overly obvious, demonstrative, and allegorical, all those banal conversations, the instructive story of Domenico or the intentionally "wise" conversations with the "simple folk" suddenly disclosed their amazing sense. The concluding single take restored an air of mystery to everything². We shall watch only 12

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Coming Back Home. (In Praise of the Province). The Italian Experience of Tarkovsky and Kantor

minutes of work on the final image; I am well aware that considering the time intended for presentations at our conference this might prove to be a rather risky attempt. The sequence starts with Domenico's speech. Let us then briefly recall who he is. What is *Nostalghia* about?

Domenico is an apparently deranged former small-town maths teacher, who for seven years forbade his wife and children to set foot outside their home in order to protect them against the end of the world, a catastrophe whose approach he fears. Having set his family free, he becomes possessed by an *idée fixe* – we learn that every so often he is detained by the police and then escorted home, rendering the realisation of his project impossible. This is the way in which the director described Domenico's *dramatis persona*, whose role grew while shooting the film:

Tonino Guerra [the co-author of the *Nostalghia* screenplay - Z. B.] found this person in a newspaper clipping and we since developed it a bit further. (...) He is obsessed with the thought of committing an act of faith, such as walking straight across a pool – a gigantic, square, old Roman bath in the centre of the Tuscan village of Bagno Vignoni — with a lit candle in his hand³. On the eve of his return to Russia (the Soviet Union), Gorchakov – the film's leading protagonist, a Russian intellectual, poet, scholar, and expert on Italian culture conducting a scientific trip around Italy in the footsteps of another Russian émigré, a musician and a composer (more about him in a while) – decides to carry out Domenico's plan. He does so just before going back home, having found out about Domenico's act of sacrifice on television news. – "Switch on your TV" – an Italian translator, Gorchakov's travelling companion, phones him. Domenico left for Rome to commit self-immolation next the statue of Marcus Aurelius on the Capitol and in this way to stridently convey his protest; the pertinent scene, however, shows him calmly warning about the state of the contemporary world in the throes of a crisis and on its way towards self-annihilation. At the same time, Gor-

chakov (his suitcases packed and waiting in front of the hotel) cancels his ride to the airport (the taxi is ready), and returns to Bagno Vignoni, where earlier he had learned about Domenico's "story", met and talked with him at his home; now, he intends to fulfil Domenico's irrational project which, he believes, will save humankind. Gorchakov walks into the pool, which at that moment is being cleaned (the water spouting from the steamy springs is shallow, and the small-town dwellers are engaged in removing assorted debris of contemporary civilisation, bottles and coins thrown in for luck by tourists); he lights a candle and embarks upon the arduous attempt at carrying it from one end of the pool to the other. Gorchakov is sick and weary (this is the way he appears throughout the whole film – he suffers from a heart condition). Finally, after two unsuccessful attempts (the wind puts out the candle midway and then just before completing the task) Gorchakov, who each time starts anew, shields the flickering flame with his coat and hand (watching him, we can almost feel his physical effort and fatigue) and manages to place the candle at the foot of a wall on the opposite end of the pool. From here, a single long and slow take leads us to the above-mentioned final shot: a wooden cottage straight out a Russian village, inscribed into the ruins of a Cistercian abbey, the twelfth-century Gothic cathedral of San Galgano. Actually, we do not see this image right away and it comes into view gradually. First, there is Gorchakov sitting on the ground in front of a puddle; behind him there stretches a Russian landscape with the cottage and a path gently winding down into a valley and leading to the house. This is the same house, which appeared at the beginning of the film as part of a dream, a reminiscence (?) accompanying the protagonist on his Italian journey. The dog lying next to Gorchakov is the one from the recurring images of the Russian country house, and from an Italian hotel room where at night it sleeps next to the bed of the tired Gorchakov. This is the dog from under the colonnade in Piazza de Campidoglio amidst people indifferently listening to Domenico a moment before his self-immolation, the same dog which anxiously twists and turns, and howls in fear and pain as it witnesses the flames embracing Domenico's convulsively writhing body. In the last shot, the puddle reflects three rectangular shafts of light. The slowly withdrawing camera pans back, revealing the architecture of the cathedral; only then do we see the image in its entirety: man, dog, and country house inserted into the walls of the ruined cathedral of San Galgano. The light glistening in the puddle actually shines through the empty windows of the presbytery. We hear singing, a plaintive chant, a Russian folk song resembling a blend of a lament and a lullaby. Illuminated snowflakes melting on the ground and in the puddle slowly

fall on the man gazing ahead, the dog at his side, the house, and the church. It starts to snow.

The dramaturgy of this sequence is probably best evoked in: *The final editing plan of "Nostalghia"*, recorded in Tarkovsky's *Diaries* [*Time within Time: The Diaries*]:

(...)

9. *Campidoglio*

The deranged; Domenico on horseback; Gorchakov returns to Bagno Vignoni; Domenico's two hour-long speech; petrol; broken tape recorder; fire; Domenico's death; Beethoven.

10. *Crossing over with a candle; Gorchakov's death; Gorchakov's country house within cathedral walls; Freeze-frame; Russian song; Verdi.*

11. *Dedication: In memory of my mother.*⁴

Let us once again cite Batkin and his description of the closing image: This shocking, surrealistic and possibly ingenious shot is constructed in such a way that space is perceived completely naturally as a holistic image stemming from the film's theme. It simply remains in front of our eyes, and will always do so. This is the afterlife future, the next world. Inside, there is our Italian present, the courtyard of a church already mentioned by Dante. The future within a Romanesque church, Italy, emigration, and the present. Russia is that village with the protagonist sitting on the slope of a hillock and the same dog at his side. Initially, the camera notices only a puddle strangely divided by sunbeams. At first, I was unable to understand the nature of the rays and the source of the light falling through an arcade of an Italian, probably twelfth-century church.

Finally, all became one – the past, the present and the future, Russia, Italy, life and eternity. All matched the space of that world, surrealistically constructed thanks to the magnificent quality of the image. The most amazing thing is that we are simply unaware of the editing. Italy is the suitable place for this green slope, that glistening puddle, all that which is Russian. Peace descends upon the soul. And yet this is one of the most artificial moments in the whole film...

*I felt confused. After all, everything that which I liked and disliked in this film, its epiphany and suffering, its sincerity and artificiality, came together in the finale. This is a blend of higher art and truth, the demonstrative quality of the idea and visual conviction. I do not know how this was achieved. Nevertheless, the whole plot is resolved in this unusual, long take.*⁵

Why have I decided to take you back to this symbol at a conference about the *Images and Myths of Europe? The Western and the Eastern Perspectives?* There are at least several reasons. To start with the most obvious one, I believe that the image in question could become

a framework for further reflections, or constitute a firm point of reference and landmark in the course of our discussion. One could say that *Nostalgia* and its closing or, as Batkin declared, “prime and essential” depiction contain almost everything that is associated with the province and its eulogy: a Russian country house inscribed into the walls of a cathedral. That which is connected with the landscape of folk, provincial and “low” culture, that which is low, mundane, simple, human, and local has been installed into that which is lofty, universal and high. The architecture of the towering cathedral, whose raw, unadorned and decaying walls and transparent openings-remnants of a rosace and windows let in the light from above, embraces the whole image. “This world” (“my local world”) has been literally incorporated into “that world”, a historical, geographical, cultural, mythical, existential, religious and metaphysical dimension. You see how difficult it is to describe this composite, poignant and original image, which I regard as part of a certain tendency that could be described as an “Eastern perception” of Europe and art. I discern an amazing coincidence between Tarkovsky’s imagery with that which in the 1980s (at exactly the same time, since *Nostalgia* was made in 1983) Janusz Bogucki (art critic and author of numerous exhibitions) described in a series of displays featured in Poland as “art going back home”, “a return to the church”. I have in mind his “Labyrinths” series, shown in the ruins of a church undergoing reconstruction in Żytnia Street in Warsaw, or later in the austere interior of a church under construction in the district of Ursynów. In the 1990s, the same current was present in the “Epitaph and seven spaces” exhibition at the “Zachęta” Gallery in Warsaw and at the nearby Ethnographic Museum, the site of an encounter of popular folk art accompanying the cult of the images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Częstochowa. The leitmotif of these shows was a fusion of secular and religious art, high art and “low” folk art, popular native art with the art of an ostensibly distant culture, and, finally, modern art and art inspired by folk architecture. In “Seven spaces” *Holy Mount* by Grzegorz Kłaman, *Tents* by Magdalena Abakanowicz, and *School Desks* from Kantor’s *The Dead Class* were shown together with *Home* by the Group from Lucim (Bohdan and Witold Chmielewski, Wiesław Smużny).⁶ The concept of these exhibitions, apart from emphasis on the multi-cultural experience of the *sacrum*, was to arrange a meeting of assorted religious, spiritual traditions. (The subtitle of “Seven spaces” was: “The paths, traditions and peculiarities of spiritual life in Poland reflected in the mirror of art at the end of the twentieth century”).

Could there be a more apt description of the complex imagery proposed by Tarkovsky in *Nostalgia* than “going back home – a return to the church”? We





Photos from the *Nostalghia*, by Andrej Tarkowski

come across the same spirit, tone, reflection of an idea, and longing for unity in yet another arrival from “a distant land”; the discussed image reflects a conception close to the vision expounded by John Paul II when he spoke about the two lungs of Europe (eastern and western tradition).

It is a known fact that the author of *Andrei Rublyov* frequently disassociated himself from symbolic and metaphorical interpretations of his films. Actually, the whole question is much more complicated⁷, since it is possible to formulate and justifiably defend the thesis that we are dealing with a pure symbol, a combination (Greek: *syn-ballo*, *symbollein*) of two separate parts. In other words, *Nostalghia* and its final image possess a feature described by Richard R. Niebhur writing about the symbol: *We do not embellish our experiences with symbols but it is they, which cooperate with our experience via processes of affiliation, which we understand only partially. To symbolize means to arrange those particles and elements of a flowing stream of experiences, which, once united, create luminescence, temporary or permanent rays, in which a part of the cosmos, a corner of our habitat or some dark subterranean labyrinth lightens up*⁸. In Tarkovsky’s film this merger and luminescence are conspicuous. The director’s distance towards the symbol never changes. In a chapter on *After finishing Nostalghia* in his *Zapiechlennoye vremia* (Sculpting in Time) he wrote: *Of late, I have frequently found myself addressing audiences, and I have noticed that whenever I declare that there are no symbols or metaphors in my films, those present express incredulity. They persist in ask-*

ing again and again, for instance, what rain signifies in my films; why does it figure in film after film; and why the repeated images of wind, fire, water? I really don’t know how to deal with such questions.

Rain is after all typical of the landscape in which I grew up; in Russia you have those long, dreary, persistent rains. And I can say that I love nature – I don’t like big cities and feel perfectly happy when I’m away from the paraphernalia of modern civilisation, just as I felt wonderful in Russia when I was in my country house, with three hundred kilometres between Moscow and myself. Rain, fire, water, snow, dew, the driving ground wind – all are part of the material setting in which we dwell; I would even say of the truth of our lives. I am therefore puzzled when I am told that people cannot simply enjoy watching nature, when it is lovingly reproduced on the screen, but have to look for some hidden meaning they feel it must contain. Of course, rain can be just seen as bad weather, whereas I use it to create a particular aesthetic setting in which to steep introduce the plot. But that is not at all the same things as bringing nature into my films as a symbol of something else. Heaven forbid! In commercial

cinema nature often does not exist at all; all one has is the most advantageous lighting and exteriors for the purpose of quick shooting — everybody follows the plot and no one is bothered by the artificiality of a setting that is more or less right, nor by the disregard for detail and atmosphere. When the screen brings the real world to the audience, the world as it actually is, so that it can be seen in depth and from all sides, evoking its very smell, allowing audiences to feel on their skin its moisture or its dryness

— it seems that the cinema-goer has so lost the capacity simply to surrender to an immediate, emotional aesthetic impression, that he instantly has to check himself, and ask: 'Why? What for? What's the point?'⁹

Slightly further on, in a reference to the image of interest to us, the director added:

*I would concede that the final shot of Nostalgia has an element of metaphor, when I bring the Russian house inside the Italian cathedral. It is a constructed image which smacks of literariness: a model of the hero's state, of the division within him which prevents him from living as he has up till now. Or perhaps, on the contrary, it is his new wholeness in which the Tuscan hills and the Russian countryside come together indissolubly; he is conscious of them as inherently his own, merged into his being and his blood. And so Gorchakov dies in this new world where those things come together naturally and of themselves which in our strange and relative earthly existence have for some reason, or by someone, been divided once and for all. All the same, even if the scene lacks cinematic purity, I trust that it is free of vulgar symbolism; the conclusion seems to me fairly complex in form and meaning, and to be a figurative expression of what is happening to the hero, not a symbol of something outside him which has to be deciphered.*¹⁰

There is no time for expanding and justifying the thesis that the discussed image is a symbol if only due to those features whose presence is stressed by hermeneutist: the ambiguity, multiple meanings, composite nature, complexity, and, more precisely, the dynamic and dialectic of the symbol are the reasons why it is both simple and complicated, ever enrooted in the concrete and reality. Why it combines the sensual and the intellectual. Why its characteristic traits include the retention of a dual character: reality and unreality/irreality since it would have not been a symbol if it had been only real, it would have been a real phenomenon which could not be symbolic; only that which within one thing encompasses another is symbolic. If a symbol were to be unreal, then it would be empty and imaginary, with no references to any sort of reality, and thus it would not have been a symbol (C. G. Jung); the symbol always contains something organic, archaic (S. Avierintsev, Y. Lotman). They are the reason why one can see the whole *via* a particle: *each time it refers to that what is most prominent – the idea of the wholeness and unity of the world, a fully cosmic and human universe* (S. Avierintsev, Y. Lotman). Why the symbol is not only (a single) given meaning, but a "task" – *the sense of the symbol comes into being not solely as a ready presence but also as a dynamic tendency: it is not given but assigned. You must change your life* [ultimately, this is Domenico's message to the divided world of the "healthy" and the "normal, the "people from the centre" and the "peripheries". His sacrifice takes place in front of an uninterested audi-

ence to the strains of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* from the *Ninth Symphony*, today the hymn of a united Europe]; *the sense of a symbol cannot be deciphered through the effort of the mind alone, one must "enter into its spirit"*¹¹. Finally, they are the reason why it has a dialogical structure, and why consideration of the symbol is a dialogical form of cognition (S. Avierintsev). And so on, and so forth.

On the other hand, it is worth drawing attention to yet another factor essential in the structure of the symbolic image from Tarkovsky's finale. In its primary meaning, the symbol was identification. In antiquity – a topic extensively discussed by Pavel Florensky in his *Ikonostasis*¹² – the symbol was an object made of clay, wood, or metal, divided into two parts, a picture cut into two, a document, a cube, a tablet, or anything which after being put together regains its meaning and once again serves as an identification. It was mutually offered by friends, business partners, debtors and creditors, pilgrims, people linked by various bonds, who split the "symbol" into two fragments that in the future, placed side by side either by them or their messengers could comprise an identification. *The symbol made it possible to recognise one's own.*¹³ It contains all the warmth of a secret that binds together. The symbol acts as a sign of identity and unity (it is also a credo). In the case of Tarkovsky, it is two different parts, two different images brought together. These are not merely images of Europe as such, Western Europe, Italy and the Russian provinces, but basically of two provinces: the West European, Italian province (Tuscany) and its Russian counterpart. Images of the country house and the cathedral, parallel symbolic images of the world: the house and the church (both comprising *imago mundi, essentially the home and the church are one*¹⁴) *are here put together* and coalesced into a single organic whole without obliterating the differences. This surreal image-symbol, an identification, assembled and offered in the final act of *Nostalghia*, expresses, demonstrates and discovers that which is held so dear by anthropology, and which is close to its motifs and fundamental experiences, as well as the European vision and idea (of what Europe is, could or should be). It is a discovery of unity in diversity.

Returning to the main theme, I shall try to propose a greatly abbreviated designation of the foremost landmarks and motifs on our map of meanings contained in reflections about the province; produced by that special perception of Europe seen from the East, this is the vision recorded by Tarkovsky in the oft-mentioned finale of *Nostalghia*.

In the person of the leading *dramatis persona* we have: 1. an arrival from a distant province, 2. a motif of the home and going back home, 3. an attachment to one's native land and a longing for it, 4. nostalgia:

suffering caused by separation from the home and motherland, the impossibility of going back home or the efforts such a return entails.

Home

The home appears already at the very onset of the sequence: Domenico sets fire to his body, “the home of his soul”, and someone else (Gorchakov) carries the light to the other end of the pool in his stead. In *Nostalghia* we have, therefore, not only a forecast of Tarkovsky’s next film *The Sacrifice* (whose finale features a burning house), but also a continuation of the theme and image of the home present also in this director’s other films preceding *Nostalghia*. In her essay *Home and Road*, Neya Zorkaya¹⁵ extensively discussed the significant motif of the home in Tarkovsky’s oeuvre. We see it in *Solaris: The home-ideal and the home-remembrance – this is the home of Kelvin-the father, built not in a fantastic landscape but in native Russian countryside: a house standing under oak trees, a green glade on the banks of an overgrown stream*.¹⁶ “The thinking ocean bestows peace upon Kris’ troubled soul, offering him an image of his father’s home. Ivan [My Name is Ivan (Ivan’s Childhood)] wanders across a wartime wilderness, while the charred house gazes after him with empty eye sockets”.¹⁷

In *Mirror* it is the family home, enveloped in love and the sadness of nostalgia, made out of beams and standing under pine trees – the promised land of childhood.¹⁸ In *Stalker* the dream-sequence room, to which the hero keeps on returning, shakes to the rhythm of a speeding train – the lamp, the table, the whole room tremble. It is simply impossible to ignore the oneiric motif of the “dream home”, whose portrayal in *Nostalghia* accompanies the protagonist in his dreams and reminiscences throughout his Italian voyage and reappears at its end. It is the home described by Gaston Bachelard:

The real world becomes obliterated whenever we transfer our thoughts to the home of our memories. What is the significance of the houses we pass by while walking down a street if our memory recalls our family home, the home of absolute intimacy, the home from which we derived the very conception of intimacy? This home is somewhere far away, we have lost it, and no longer live in it, and we know, unfortunately for certain, that we shall never again do so. Then the home becomes more than a mere memory – it is the home of our dreams. (...) What is real: the home in which we go to sleep, or the home to which we loyally return once we had fallen asleep?¹⁹

Tarkovsky wrote about Gorchakov: (...) acutely aware of being an outsider who can only watch other people’s lives from a distance, crushed by the recollections of his past, by the faces of those dear to him, which assail his memory together with the sounds and smells of home.²⁰

Nostalghia

Gorchakov is a poet who travels to Italy to collect material about Beryozovsky, a Russian serf, musician and composer (in the film he is mentioned as Sosnovsky). *Beryozovsky is an historical figure, Tarkovsky wrote. He showed such musical ability that he was sent by his landowner to study in Italy, where he stayed many years, gave concerts and was much acclaimed. But in the end, driven no doubt by that same inescapable Russian nostalgia, he eventually decided to return to serf-owning Russia, where, shortly afterwards, he hanged himself*;²¹ elsewhere, the director added: ... he turned alcoholic and subsequently committed suicide.²² At this point, we arrive at the specific phenomenon of nostalgia, whose very meaning is enclosed in a combination of two Greek words: *nóstos* – return, and *algos* – suffering. In the earlier mentioned essay: *What is Nostalghia?* Leonid Batkin, whose interpretation is often extremely critical and full of scathing irony and malice towards the film, its author, and the solutions applied in certain scenes, acknowledged the importance of the closing image, which “restores an air of mystery to everything”. (I shall never forgive Tarkovsky this, from my point of view, disastrous film in which his heretofore poetics falls apart). On the other hand, Batkin appears to agree with the director as regards one thing: Russian nostalgia is exceptional. Batkin started collecting solutions to the key question concerning the nature of nostalgia by comparing poems by Josif Brodsky (*December in Florence*, and then other works) with Tarkovsky’s film in order to disclose the strikingly unusual condition of the main protagonist. While travelling to and across Italy Andrei Gorchakov constantly turns away from its beauty and outright tries to ignore it. (I shall cite only a fragment of the poem mentioned by Baktin, indispensable for the clarity of further argumentation):

*In a smoke-filled café, in the semi-shade of his cap
He grows accustomed to the nymphs on the ceiling, the
cupids, the stucco
(...)
A sunbeam refracted against a palace,
The dome of a church with Lorenzo’s final resting
place,
Permeates the curtains and warms the veins
Of dirty marble, a vat with a flowering verbena:
And trills resound in the centre of Ravenna made of
wire.*

Behold, a Russian émigré in Italy, Batkin wrote. His name is Josif Brodsky. Perhaps he is the protagonist of Tarkovsky’s *Nostalghia*. The words used by Brodsky convey visual impressions – “smoke-filled”, “semi-shade”, “dirty” (...) Gazing from under a Russian cap (I made it up), he reluctantly and even with disgust gets

used to Baroque or Renaissance forms. Brodsky wrote about the dome of a church with Lorenzo's final resting place... Dear God, this is Santa Maria del Fiore! Quite possibly the most amazing dome in the whole world. He, however, does not want to look at it. The curtains are drawn. A sunbeam indifferently passes the magnificent church and occupies itself with something else: it warms up the dirty marble and a vat. Such a vat could have easily found itself in Tarkovsky's film. We can easily imagine the whole situation: a café, the camera focused on the stuccoed ceiling, halting next to a birdcage, observing the curtains penetrated by a sunbeam, and the dust floating in the air. In a drawn-out take we see the veins of the unwashed marble floor. The caged goldfinch, an imprisoned singer, exiled. Dante in Ravenna, and the Russian artist – Brodsky or Tarkovsky, or simply some "Andrei, the writer" – as an émigré, homesick, alone, in the wire cage of Italy.²³

Further on, there is no more scoffing, and the author of *Nostalgia* and his interpreter concur. Nostalgia is a truly serious issue.

Tarkovsky:

The nostalgia of my film is a fatal illness suffered by someone who is far from his own origins and cannot return there. It is an illness. How else can one describe something, which deprives man of his vital forces, entire energy, and joy of living? Not simply a feeling of sadness. The victim becomes crippled, and a certain part of him ceases to exist. A Russian will not harbour any doubts – this illness is real. I find it very difficult to speak about nostalgia in a manner comprehensible to people who are not Russians. I repeat, this is a illness (...). If a person proves incapable of overcoming it, it becomes a fatal illness, contracted only abroad. Travelling across Russia I might experience sadness but not nostalgia. (...) [*Nostalgia*] is more than longing.²⁴

Batkin:

Russian nostalgia is exceptional, deprived of all hope, and incurable ... It is, however, the last level of that which Petrarch, also familiar with this emotion, as is every man of the West (there is no need to exaggerate: although we live on different planets we still remain in the same galaxy of culture), described as "acedia" – the final stage of an inexplicable dislike towards the world.²⁵

Nostalgia is caused by a division of the world.

Tarkovsky:

This will be a film about how appalling it is that in the twentieth century we are incapable of enabling all those persons dearest to us to witness our journeys. Or, on the contrary, that we would like to tell everyone whom we meet, in this case in Italy, about our native land, and are unable to do this well owing to the great differences divid-

ing us; the heart of the matter thus involves the tragedy of being unable to communicate ... I have in mind communication in the supreme meaning of the word. (...) In addition, we are forced to take into account the fact that no translation of a literary work, even the most sensitive one, can convey the true profundity and subtlety of a language. Take the example of the word "nostalgia". Even if I were to become fluent in Italian, as a Russian I shall never understand Petrarch entirely, just as an Italian will not understand Pushkin. (...) We in the Soviet Union pretend that we understand Dante and Petrarch, but this is not true. And Italians pretend to know Pushkin, but that is also an erroneous assumption.²⁶

[About Gorchakov]: Knowing full well that he cannot make use of his Italian experiences increases his internal pain, "nostalgia", which includes an awareness of the fact that he is totally unable to share his experiences with his dear ones at home, even with those who were closest to him before he left for Italy.²⁷

Batkin:

[About Gorchakov] "He says: I have grown bored with your beauty, I don't want it for myself alone... [...] This is the feeling of an utterly personal and terrible deprivation committed by those who are not accompanying him in Italy. An extremely private spiritual agitation. I consider this question through the prism of my own experiences. I spent my whole life studying Italy, and last year for the first time I stayed for a few days in Rome and Bari. I became haunted by a strange feeling: why only I? In such a moment it is quite natural to think about those closest to us, all those Russians standing at bus stops and in enormous queues in front of shops, who do not even suspect that it is possible to lead a different life. This is by no means some sort of an altruistic reflection. We weep over our joint plight, in which your individual life also takes part"²⁸

Tarkovsky (supplementing this singular meaning of the word "nostalgia"):

This is the reason why nostalgia is not grief for the past (...)

And we Russians, for us nostalgia is not a gentle and benevolent emotion (...). For us it is a sort of deadly disease, a mortal illness, a profound compassion that binds us not so much with our own privation, our longing, our separation, but rather with the suffering of others, a passionate empathy.²⁹

Once again Batkin, since the last word always belongs to the interpreter:

What is this terrible Russian nostalgia? I asked myself: was Gogol homesick while in Rome? He led a peaceful life, loved the town, and wrote *Dead Souls*. Did Turgenev long for Russia? We cannot tell. Perhaps he felt homesick in the winter, but certainly not in the summer when he

moved back to his estate. Quite possibly, this is just common human homesickness, a yearning for the homeland experienced by everyone. In the case of Tarkovsky, however, it is the longing of an exile, a political émigré, and not simply the homesickness of a person who had left for a short while. The exile's homeland has been amputated. He cannot return whenever he wishes to do so. Unlike others, he cannot see his native land. This is the first and simplest secret of Russian nostalgia. We are not dealing with commonplace departure, but with amputation. When one leaves at the age of fifteen, one turns into a Frenchman or an American, and even more so if one leaves aged five. As a rule, however, we set off as adults, and this means that we become deprived of our childhood, youth, the best years of our lives, our health and strength – all that which existed in Russia when we were young, even if this was corvee-era Russia. (...) To this we must add something, which Eugenia [Gorchakov's guide and translator] noticed, namely, that we never arrive from another country, but move to a different planet. I believe that this holds true also for Andrei Tarkovsky; we never travelled while young, although it has been known for centuries that one should start seeing the world in one's youth. We find the West, America and Italy strange. We arrive there when we are already tired. We do not speak the language and find ourselves in a different civilisation, not Russian and even more so not Soviet. We adapt with much greater difficulty than a Calabrian peasant woman in northern Italy.³⁰

Why have I devoted so much attention to bitter reflections about nostalgia (not by chance is “the writer Andrei” in Tarkovsky's film called Gorchakov – from the Russian word for bitter)? In contemporary culture numerous types and variants of “going back to the province” or the concept of nostalgia in popular mass culture (the cinema, television series) have assumed a gentle character, and tend to resemble reminiscences, an alluring return to the past. Or, even if this sounds like a contradiction: a realised nostalgic return. Nostalgia has become fashionable. In *Czytanie kultury* (Deciphering Culture) Wojciech Burszta³¹ devoted a whole chapter: *Nostalgia and myth, or on the mechanism of the return* to this mild version of facile and pleasant nostalgia; here, nostalgia is situated in close proximity to such concepts as fashion, pastiche, and stylisation, and becomes a commodity. In Burszta's meticulous survey of assorted interpretations of nostalgia in contemporary anthropological literature, based chiefly on American works on the topic, we would seek in vain an Eastern view of the titular question, its “difficult case” (although the author should be praised for citing Czesław Miłosz's poem *Capri* from the volume: *On The River Bank*). Apparently, a division of the world into the centre and the province, at least in anthropological reflections (a global world without boundaries and history), retains its firm position - but then

who, apart from fanatics and experts, not to mention Western anthropologists specialising in nostalgia, is familiar with the works of Tarkovsky and Brodsky or even heard about them? This is why I regard the model-like, serious, “Russian” clinical case as noteworthy and deserving to be included into our anthropological musings. Even more so considering that the imagery proposed by Tarkovsky combines the motif of the home and going back home with certain findings by David R. Lachterman about the relations between the Greek *noos* - intellect and *nostos* - return. The article: *Noos and Nostos. The Odyssey and the Origins of Greek Philosophy*, was published in a special issue of “Konteksty” about the anthropology of memory. In places, it sounds very specialist and philosophical, but from our vantage point it is of great value owing to its poetic and anthropological reflections. Those interested in the whole argumentation are recommended to read the article³², from which I have selected only those trails that could cast a certain light on the profound qualities of the imagery in *Nostalghia* and its closeness to the archaic base.

In order to recall the dark and gloomy likenesses of Italy recorded in *Nostalghia* let us see what the director had to say - after finishing work, he registered a surprising reaction:

*I have to say that when I first saw all the material shot for the film I was startled to find it was a spectacle of unrelieved gloom. The material was completely homogeneous, both in its mood and in the state of mind imprinted in it.*³³

While reflecting on the connections between *noos*-intellect and *nostos*-return, Lachterman drew our attention to the absence of clarity in the contrast between *mythos* and *logos* (which up to this day serves as a basis for our characterisations of the myth, contrasted with the precise speech of science, and for comparing “pre-scientific” poetry and supposedly abstract “scientific” philosophy). He also traced the subtle play of the meanings of the *noos/nostos* combination recorded in the *Odyssey* (if only in the names of those who assisted Odysseus in his return home: Alkinoos [the king of the Phaiakians, *alke* = force, power], and those who hampered it - Antinoos [the leader of the suitors, *anti*]). Lachterman wrote: There is no need to present in detail the studies conducted by Frame and Frei, each of whom ascertained that *noos* is a derivative of the root* *ne*, historically confirmed in the passive-active verb *neomai* and in the noun formation *nostos*. Frame associated the root **nes* with “archaic solar mythology”, suggesting that originally *noos* signified “a return from the dead to light and life”. Despite the fact that Frei had less dealings with the Sanskrit he reached a similar conclusion, indicating that the oldest (pre-Homer) meaning of *noos* is “getting over something”, “a fortunate evasion of danger”.

We discover all the motifs contained in *noos/nostos* within the dark imagery devised by Tarkovsky, and laboriously traverse them until we arrive at the final image of “going back home”, “getting over something”, “evading danger”, “returning from the dead to light and life”. Father Tomáš Špidlík interpreted *Nostalghia* as a transition from nostalgia to *anamnesis*: The concept of *anamnesis* is liturgical, but it possesses its secular counterpart – nostalgia. There are two perceptible variants. Nostalgia is experienced as a result of a past regarded as lost. On the other hand, *anamnesis* is joyful reminiscence, which renders the past a fragment of the present to an extent greater than when it was first experienced. The film by Tarkovsky is entitled *Nostalghia*. If I were to describe its contents I would apply precisely those two concepts - the film shows the enormous force of religious feelings, capable of transforming nostalgia into *anamnesis*.³⁴

The Italian experiences of Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983) and Tadeusz Kantor's *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980, a theatrical spectacle staged as part of the Florentine programme at Teatro Regionale Toscano, Florence) share the motif of the return home, inscribed into the Italian cultural landscape. The next problem is the inclusion of local, own cultural tradition into the universal entity. Both works share the motif of coming back home, nostalgia, the experiencing of the province, an epiphany of poor reality, and the significance of “reality of the lowest rank”.

In *Nostalghia* we are dealing with the same epiphany as in the case of Tadeusz Kantor - the epiphany of “poor reality”.

While seeking beauty in *Nostalghia*, distinguishing between the poetics of Brodsky and Tarkovsky, and, simultaneously, accentuating the dissimilarities of their perception of the West, Batkin described Tarkovsky's concept of poor reality:

Before I say what I think about the different ways in which Brodsky and Tarkovsky understood the West and its beauty, I would like to draw attention to the most captivating frame in the film. I recall especially two episodes: the little room, one of the longest shots, in which the protagonist lay down, bowing his head and assuming a cramped, uncomfortable pose, dozing as if he were falling asleep, while outside the window there is feeble, scattered autumn light and rain, rain, rain. This scene can be watched for long without becoming bored – one simply cannot grow bored. It almost corresponds to the *dirty marble* - here too there is a floor with puddles, rubbish, beautiful bottles, to be observed for long, and light reflected in the bottles and the puddle. Every bookshelf, window pane, and Domenico's apartment can be studied at length, since each poor life object is a thing of beauty harmonising with the ruins and, at the same time, retaining its am-

biguity. What do they have in common with the Madonna del Prato, which the writer Andrei did not even want to look at, as if he had specially come in search of poor objects? Theirs is the true beauty. Poverty, dirt and neglect, which Brodsky perceived as a concentration of improbable and ultimate hopelessness and longing, serve Tarkovsky as a source of some sort of strange hope, prophecy and beauty. That which is lowliest proves to be the most important. The poorer the object shown while the camera descends increasingly lower - examining the details of earthly dust and decay below our feet - the more we notice that, which is heavenly.³⁵

Below is a description of Kantor's epiphany in a seaside province, inaugurating his theatre of death, the theatre of memory. Kantor wrote his texts in a curious fashion and used capital letters to accentuate the rank of words; in this case, the whole text was originally in full capitals. I preserved only the long “pauses” – the spacing and underlining (added later?). The original version is available in the second edition of *Kadysz*:³⁶

“The year is 1971 or '72. The seaside. A small town. Almost a village. A single street. Small, poor, ground-floor buildings. And perhaps the poorest of them all: the schoolhouse. The time was summer and school holidays. The school was empty and abandoned, with only one classroom. One could look at it through two small, wretched windows set low, right above the sidewalk. The whole impression was that the school had sunk below the level of the street. I glued my face against the panes and peered for long into the dark and disturbed abyss of my memory.

Once again I became a little boy, sitting in a poor village classroom, at a desk scarred with penknives, turning the pages of my primer, moistened with spittle, with ink-stained fingers; the eternally scrubbed floor boards had deeply ingrained rings, somehow matching the bare feet of the village boys. Whitened walls, with the plaster peeling at the bottom, and a black cross on a wall.

Today, I realise that something important had taken place in front of that window. I had made a discovery. I grew extremely vividly aware of the

EXISTENCE
OF REMINISCENCE.

This declaration is by no means, contrary to appearances, the result of exaltation and exaggeration. In our rational world reminiscence did not have a good name and was totally ignored in cold accounts with reality.

All of a sudden, I grasped its mysterious, unimaginable force.

I found out that it is an element capable of destruction and generation, that it stands at the beginning of creation.

At the beginning of art.

Suddenly, everything became clear, as if many doors had opened up towards distant, infinite landscapes and spaces.

This was no longer that shameful symptom ascribed to old age and young girls.

It transpired in its terrifying perspective, ending once and for all, in the pain of passage, and in the sweetness created by longing.

(...)

This fact,

at that precise moment when I was standing in front of the mentioned window, would not have been some sort of an exceptional reason for extolling reminiscence. This was a time when all art rapidly and light-heartedly was losing its trust in **VISIBILITY**.

On the other hand, placing this act of distrust within a phenomenon which, I dare say, is despised and suspected of mysticism and banal or senile sentimentalism,

was an act of great departure from my

beloved practices, risking the flames of the **STAKE** and the Verdicts of the **HOLY INQUISITION OF THE INTELLECT**.

Reminiscence lives beyond the range of our sight. It grows and expands in the regions of our emotions and affection and tears.

I could not have chosen a worse time, when the tribunal of the intellect wielded indivisible rule.

One was accused not of apostasy but also of backwardness.

One had to possess a harsh heretical nature.

I regarded myself as a great heresiarch.

This nostalgia, which already for a certain time had been

making itself known increasingly vividly,

THIS REVELATION

with something on the other side of the threshold of the

V I S I B L E,

mysterious and imperative,

this discovery of **REMINISCENCE**

came right on time, because in that great battle against the visible and the material,

in which I took part,

the heaviest arguments of

SCIENTISM

which I found infinitely alien, had been brought forward!

In order to close this chapter it became necessary to conduct a

REVISION

and a **REHABILITATION** of the concept of the **P A S T**.

I did that.

Wandering around the world I proclaimed the **T R I U M P H**

OF THE PAST,

daring to believe that this is the only time which is

real and significant

(in art)

because it is already in the past tense!

Finally, there came that memorable moment of deciding that one should

EXPRESS REMINISCENCE.

It then became compulsory to learn about the functioning of

MEMORY.

Thus began the decade-long era of my two works

“The Dead Class” and

“Wielopole, Wielopole”,

which were to confirm

the truth of the blasphemous ideas that I proclaimed.

This was an era of my own avantgarde.

AN AVANTGARDE OF:

REMINISCENCE,

MEMORY,

THE INVISIBLE,

EMPTINESS AND DEATH.

Death.

It ends that initially innocent

gazing through a window.

Since a window conceals many dark mysteries.

The window awakens fear and a premonition of that which is “beyond”.

And that absence of the children,

the impression that the children had already lived their life, had died

and that only through this fact of **DYING**, through death

this class becomes filled with reminiscences,

and that only then do reminiscences begin to live

and assume a mysterious spiritual power.

Then nothing is greater or stronger

(...)“.³⁷

This experience undergone in a provincial “small town” was the source not only of the origin of *The Dead Class* (1975), *Wielopole, Wielopole* (1980) and

successive spectacles: *Let the Artists Die* (1985), *I Shall Never Return* (1988) and *Today is My Birthday* (1991) - a proclamation of the itinerant Theatre of Memory, with which Kantor triumphantly travelled across the world, but also of new discoveries. "Many doors seemed to have opened", casting light on the meaning of "poor reality", the "peripheries", the province.

In a commentary to *Wielopole, Wielopole*, which re-sounds with, i. a. an echo of Bruno Schulz (*Book of Letters*), Kantor wrote:

Not everything, however, is lost. The peripheries do not denote fall and humiliation – My private dictionary contains the term Reality of the Lowest Rank. A terrain reserved (illegally) for Art. And thus for all supreme human values. There, the peripheries have their own high rank. Explosions of that myth, manifesting themselves in the most unexpected places, transpire precisely in those peripheries. Speaking in the language of art and poetry – in the poor courtyard, in the pitiful corner, where we conceal our innermost hopes, our imagination, our threatened humanity, and our personality. And - probably only there may we become redeemed. It is difficult to describe the spatial dimension of reminiscence:

*here is the room of my childhood,
which I constantly arrange anew*

*and which continually dies.
Together with its dwellers.
These occupants are my family.
They all endlessly repeat their activities,
impressed as if on a plate, for eternity
they shall repeat, until boredom sets in,
concentrated on the same gesture,
with the same facial grimace,
those banal,
elementary mediocre activities,
devoid of all expression and purposefulness.
With excessive dull precision
with terrifying ostentation,
persistently,
those petty occupations filling our lives...
DEAD DUMMIES,
gaining reality and importance
through that obstinate - REPETITION.
Quite possibly, this is a property of
Reminiscence,
this pulsating rhythm,
increasingly recurring,
ending in emptiness,
futile...*



Bagno Vignoni

... And then there is the place "BEHIND THE DOOR"

somewhere at the back and on the edges of the ROOM,

a different space
in a different dimension.

Where our memories press together

our freedom breeds,

in this poor place,

somewhere "in a corner",

"behind the door",

in some nameless interior of the imagination...

we stand in the doorway, saying farewell to our childhood,

helpless,

on the threshold of eternity and of death,

in this small, gloomy space,

behind this door

human hell and tempests rage,

the waves are gathering of that flood from which there is no shelter.³⁸

Franco Quadri, the author of an introduction to the Italian programme of *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*, aptly revealed the connections between the theatrical spectacle and the cinema:

*In the centre - the figure of Tadeusz Kantor, who directs his actors and calls to life his heroes and who now takes on a different dimension: he identifies himself in the action and remains in a concrete way outside it, with this décalage towards the resurrected images which brings to mind Proust or - iconographically - Bergman's Wild Strawberries, with old Sjöström who introduces his old man's ruin into the discovered picture of childhood, to produce the impression of a poignant confrontation. While working in Florence, the anti-traditional undertakings of the artist from Cracow extolled national tradition: a Polish micro-cosmos, with its culture and religiosity, becomes revived in his father's home under the incessant pressure of the same motif, while the stations of daily life are unable to free themselves from the presence of war and violence. In the mythical village of Wielopole, where Kantor was born, the stations of Christ's Passion encounter a wartime nightmare. In a syncopated construction, edited in cinematic fashion out of snippets from the past, history assumes the form of a protagonist. The theatre of repetitions speaks the language of universal quests.*³⁹

The comparison with Bergman, proposed by Quadri, cannot be upheld in any feasible way. In *Wild Strawberries* the image of the childhood home to which old, frigid Professor Borg, played by Sjöström, returns, is almost Arcadian, with a garden basking in sunlight, full of blossoming white flowers, and with white curtains fluttering in the summer breeze in wide-open windows...

Everyone who has ever seen and remembers Kantor's face looking at his actors knows that we are elsewhere... next to a very different window...

After all, the "room of my childhood", mentioned by Kantor in the above-cited commentary, is:

a dark and cluttered HOLE.

It is not true that the childhood room in our memory is always sunny and bright.

It is merely rendered such by

a conventional literary manner,

it is a DEAD room

and a room for the DEAD.

Recalled by memories -

it dies.⁴⁰

Kantor required only a window and a door, ... to put this spectacle together.⁴¹ To build a room, to enact his Forefathers' Eve rite,⁴² so that memory may recall a holy picture, which, in the finale, served him in arranging his dead at a table in a reference to the iconographic depiction of *The Last Supper* by Leonardo de Vinci.

At this point, there is a perceptible connection with Bergman, who in one of his statements declared that he had fallen under the spell of a painting entitled *The Dance of Death*, which as a child he saw in an old mediaeval church; this was the inspiration for *The Seventh Seal*. Perhaps while rehearsing his Florentine programme Kantor had once stood in Milan in front of the wall featuring Leonardo's *Last Supper* and looked at it through the prism of his Eastern memory to envisage *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*?

This is what artists, masters from the East, had brought:

A childhood room, a Forefathers' Eve rite inscribed into *The Last Supper*.

A family home and *Viechnaya pamiat'*⁴³ inscribed into the cathedral in San Galgano.

Praise be to Italy for welcoming them and offering refuge!

The province, the praise of the province, what praise could be greater than the gamut of moods, tones and shades that the province might contain: Arcadia - *Et in Arcadia ego...* *Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren...* - "the small homeland", "the poor courtyard", "somewhere in a corner", "Reality of the Lowest Rank".

The home to which one returns. An asylum. But not only, since just as in the case of the home, which one has to leave, the province might turn out to be a prison from which one must flee as quickly as possible...

This is why we end with three quotations from a gloss once prepared for a similar topic⁴⁴ and probably of use also for our reflections on the province:

Mirosław Żuławski:

I recall hazily the house, which I regarded as my family home although I was born in another. No photograph, no drawing survived. But I could describe every detail of its construction and every piece of furniture in each room. Not a single utensil from that home lasted, not a single item that existed in it at any time, not a single speck of dust, which one takes out on a shoe, shakes off or keeps. Only memory, which means more than all the others, remains. This is why I am so sensitive to the house: the walls covered with a roof and containing our family and its history. This was our home, standing apart, and no one had anything to say in it but we. It's not true that people live in a country; people live in houses standing in a country.

Witold Gombrowicz:

Fatherlands ... how is one to approach them? This is almost a banned topic. When one writes about the fatherland one's style becomes warped. How is one to write, for instance, about Poland without succumbing to the classical: "because, we the Poles", without turning oneself into a European, putting on a brave face, humiliating oneself or putting on airs – without overacting, hamming it up, biting, kicking and shoving ...; how is one to stick fingers into one's wound without making all sorts of faces due to the pain? How is one to tickle this Achilles heel without becoming a clown? (...) In my case, perhaps owing to greater geographical distance or greater spiritual distance (an art work [Gombrowicz had in mind: Trans-Atlantyk] differs from a Diary), this anti-Polish process became halted and I always wrote about Poland unemotionally as one of the obstacles making my life difficult and regarded Poland, and still do, to be merely one of my numerous problems, without forgetting for a single moment about the secondariness of this topic.

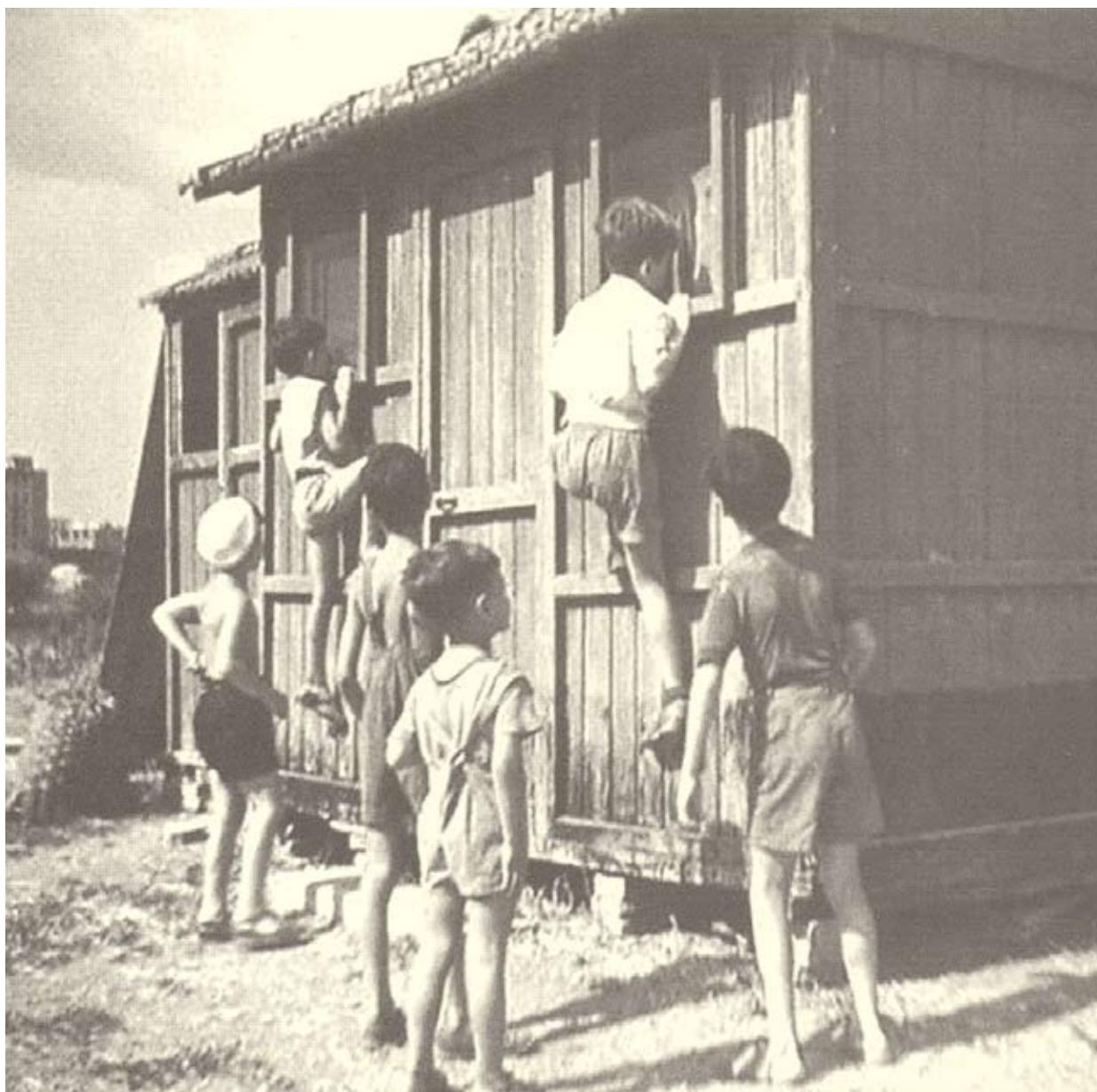
Mircea Eliade:

For any exile, fatherland signifies the mother tongue that he or she continues speaking. Fortunately, my wife is Romanian and plays the role of the homeland, if you will, as we speak to each other in Romanian. Therefore, to me "fatherland" is the language I speak with her and my friends, primarily, with her. It is the language in which I dream and write my journal. Thus, it is not only an inner, dream-related land. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction, not even a tension, between world and homeland. Everywhere, there is a Center of the World. Once one finds oneself in this center, one is home, one is truly in one's very self and in the center of the cosmos. Exile helps one understand that the world is never unfamiliar, once one has identified a center in it. This "center symbolism" is something I do not only understand, but I also live by it.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Nostalgia (Nostalgia)*, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky, screenplay by A. Tarkovsky, Tonino Guerra, production: RAI Rete andi Opera Film, Italy, 130 min. Premiere 16 May 1983 in Cannes.
- ² Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, transl. Rev. Henryk Paprocki, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, p. 216.
- ³ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Co to jest nostalgia?* [in:] *Kompleks Tolstoja. Myśli o życiu, sztuce i filmie*, selected, prep. and preface Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1989, p. 278.
- ⁴ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Dzienniki*, transl. and prep. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1998, pp. 350-351.
- ⁵ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., p. 216.
- ⁶ On those exhibitions cf. my interviews with Janusz Bogucki and Nina Smolar, *Emaus. Za mało, czy za dużo wolności? Z Januszem Boguckim i Niną Smolarz rozmawia Zbigniew Benedyktowicz*, "Konteksty. Polska sztuka Ludowa", no. 1/1993, pp. 22-29 and with Jacek Sempoliński, *O „Eptafium i siedmiu przestrzeniach” – rozmowa z Jackiem Sempolińskim*, *ibid.*, pp.19-21.
- ⁷ More extensively on this topic cf. Dariusz Czaja, *Tarkowski i symbol*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, pp. 107-113.
- ⁸ Richard. R. Niebhur, quoted after: "Harvard Divinity Bulletin", October-November 1981, p. 3.
- ⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Czas utrwalony*, transl. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1991, pp. 146-147.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ¹¹ Cf. special issue of "Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 3/1988 about the symbol, containing texts by Sergei S. Avierintsev, *Symbol*, pp. 149-150, Yuri Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, pp. 151-154, and my *Symbol w etnografii*, p. 145-148. Declaring that the symbol not only "means" but also exists in a dialogue, Avierintsev appealed to the reader while citing *Archaic Torso of Apollo* by M. R. Rilke: *You must change your life*.
- ¹² Pavel Florensky, *Ikonostasis*, transl. Zbigniew Podgórzec, Warszawa 1981.
- ¹³ Sergei S. Avierintsev, *Symbol*, op. cit., p. 149.
- ¹⁴ Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii*, transl. Jerzy Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1978, p. 441.
- ¹⁵ Neya Zorkaya, *Dom i droga*, transl. Rev. Henryk Paprocki, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, pp. 130-136.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ¹⁷ Oksana Musiyenko, *Tarkowski i idee 'filozofii bytu'*, transl. Marta Sałyga, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, pp. 232-236, 234.
- ¹⁸ Neya Zorkaya, *Dom i droga*, op. cit., p. 131.
- ¹⁹ Gaston Bechelard, *Wyobraźnia poetycka, Wybór pism*, selection Henryk Chudak, transl. Henryk Chudak, Anna Tatarkiewicz, preface Jan Błoński, Warszawa 1975, p. 301.
- ²⁰ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Czas utrwalony*, op. cit., p. 142.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Andrei Tarkovsky, *Kompleks Tolstoja*, op. cit., p. 272.
- ²³ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., p. 208.
- ²⁴ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Kompleks Tolstoja*, op. cit., pp. 270-271, 272.
- ²⁵ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., p. 212.
- ²⁶ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Kompleks Tolstoja*, op. cit., *passim*.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 272.
- ²⁸ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., pp. 209-210.

- ²⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Kompleks Tolstoja*, op. cit., pp. 274-275.
- ³⁰ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., p. 216.
- ³¹ Wojciech Burszta, *Czytanie kultury. Pięć szkiców*, Łódź 1996.
- ³² David R. Lachterman, »Noos« i »nostos«: *Odyseja i źródła filozofii greckiej*, transl. Wojciech Michera, "Konteksty" no. 3-4/2003, pp. 213-216.
- ³³ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Czas utrwalony*, op. cit., p. 142.
- ³⁴ Father Tomáš Špidlik, *Religijne podłoże filmów Tarkowskiego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, p. 187.
- ³⁵ Leonid Batkin, *Co to jest nostalgia?*, op. cit., p. 211.
- ³⁶ Jan Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, second revised edition, Biblioteka Mnemosyne ed. Piotr Kłoczowski, słowo/obraz terytoria 2007.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ T. Kantor, *Wielopole-Wielopole*, Cricot 2 Theatre, Florentine Programme.
- ³⁹ F. Quadri, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² I discuss this more extensively and in greater detail in the article: *Przestrzenie pamięci* [in:] *Film i kontekst*, ed. Z. Benedyktowicz and D. Palczewska, Ossolineum, Warszawa 1988, pp. 149-201.
- ⁴³ An interpretation of *Nostalghia* and its closing image in the category of Russian Orthodox liturgy in: Father Tomáš Špidlik, *Religijne podłoże filmów Tarkowskiego*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10, spring-summer 1995, pp. 178-190: *Time does not disintegrate into fragments but changes into eternity: wiecznaya pamiat'*, p. 187. Cf. more extensively a text by Michał Klinger: *Wieczna pamięć. Eschatologiczny wymiar pamięci*, "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa" no. 1-2/2004, pp. 237-242: *At the end of the Russian Orthodox funeral ritual, which, as we saw, is based on images of corporeality and its drama, there appears a conception expressly borrowed from the Bible and the Mosaic revelation: a grand hymn comprised of only two words: "Eternal memory, eternal memory, eternal memory ..." repeated endlessly*, p. 241.
- ⁴⁴ *Home is where one starts from*. Glosa, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" no. 4/1990, pp. 62-63.



At Home

If we were to ponder for even a moment upon the ostensibly commonplace expression used daily: "I'm at home.... I feel at home...", we might realize that it evokes one of the greatest values of life. After all, "to be at home" signifies not only to reside in one's home. It also denotes to be oneself, in harmony with oneself and all that surrounds us. Moreover, it signifies an extremely precious feeling of inner peace, an accord with the world and a spiritual equilibrium.

In European painting – and probably only in that particular realm – this emotion was expressed in images. In this case, the homes are not imaginary but, as a rule, close to the life of the period. Characteristically, paintings depicting interiors in which "one feels at home" remain the domain of Netherlandish, German and Scandinavian art. The reasons are probably numerous: the cold that compels to seek a warm refuge, the burgher culture that envisages the home as a haven, the longing for privacy with a distinctly delineated boundary between that which is one's own and that which is alien, the need to possess space that is ours and subjected to us, and, predominantly, the yearning for a safe refuge in a world of our own, safe, well-ordered, devoid of the haphazardness of fate, predictable and closed against external threats.

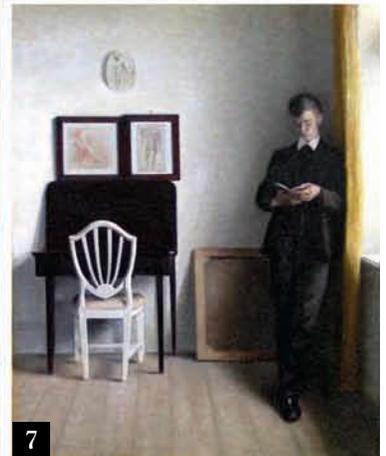
The first to introduce the interiors of homes were the Low Countries paintings of the fifteenth century, making it possible to take a look into the prosperous and neat chambers in which Mary feeds the Infant, with all the *spiritualia* concealed *sub metaforis corporaliūm*. There are no signs of sanctity, but ordinary, sturdy outfitting – fireplaces, benches, pillows, candlesticks and mirrors endowed with religious significance. This secular-sacral space is closed to the forces of evil: in the Merode altarpiece St. Joseph in his carpenter's workshop sets traps for mice – the embodiment of diabolical forces. The order of the homestead is a reflection of a higher, divine order.

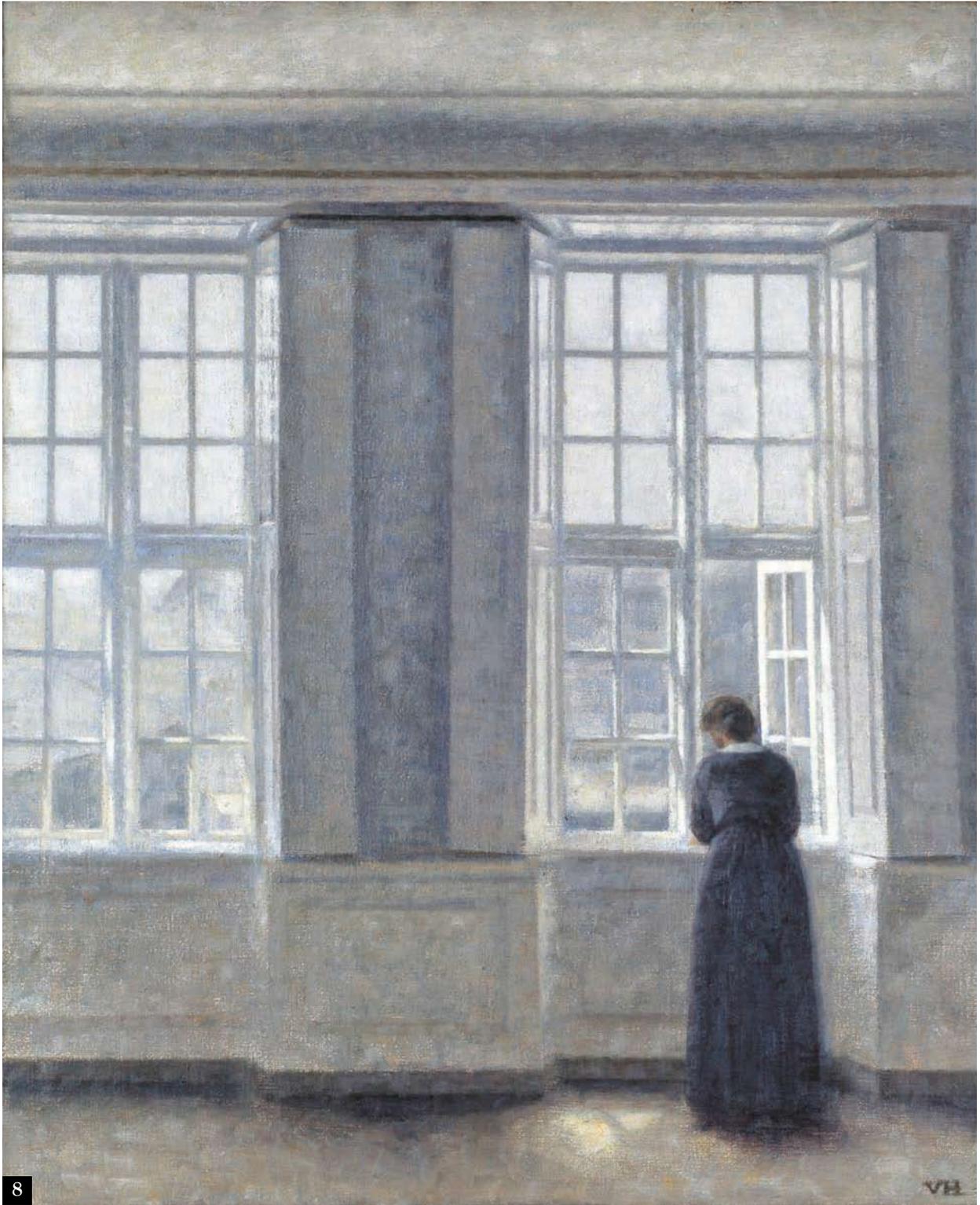
The chamber in which Giovanni Arnolfini ceremoniously stretches out his left hand towards the pregnant wife is thoroughly secular but also full of hidden meanings. The Arnolfini couple celebrate the portrayed ceremony in the privacy of their home, conceived as a site suitable for nuptials. The painting by Jan van Eyck is endlessly interpreted anew. The indubitable fact is that together with the painter-witness of the event; we have been permitted not only to take part in an important act but also to share the intimacy of the bedroom of a married couple, a sphere of the most protected privacy.

Paintings presenting home interiors create a specific relation between the depicted world and the spectator. We are looking at something that is not on view. Seventeenth-century Dutch paintings of interiors place us in the ambiguous role of invisible voyeurs. We are not guests but neither do we trespass. Our unnoticed presen-

ce does not leave behind any traces on the immaculately glistening floors in the pedantic interiors depicted by Pieter de Hoogh and other masters of Dutch *interieurs*. Our intrusion into this world of ideal burgher order obviously goes unnoticed by the women absorbed in their simple household chores. Even the little dogs accompanying them do not detect the presence of a stranger. Nothing disturbs the tranquillity. Nonetheless, we find ourselves in a strangers' home. Are we invited, or not? Are we stealing a look, or becoming involved in a game played with the spectator by the painted image of privacy? After all, this spotlessness, industriousness and affluence of the home are demonstrated for our sake. We are supposed to look and admire. It is art that entitles and invites us to gaze at something which in reality is inaccessible to the sight of an outsider.

Another sort of apprehension is created by the images of home interiors popular in German Romantic art and the Biedermeier culture. It was introduced by the motif of the window, through which a solitary figure, shown from the interior, looks out. For long, this particular motif has been perceived as an image condensing the tension and dilemmas characteristic for the epoch, constructed upon a fundamental juxtaposition between "here" and "there", and based on the contrast between distance and proximity. The window is a border of the conceptions of life and the world. The inhabited interior, the world created by man, opens up to the great universe of Nature. It also offers an opportunity to seek a haven against the outer world in peaceful daily life, and a likelihood of tackling its challenges and dangers. The orderliness and matter-of-factness of the interior are contrasted with a hazy and conjectural landscape, the concrete – with imagination. The window is a threshold but also a barrier. It divides the domesticated, intimate and familiar refuge from distant, unknown and alien space. It confronts secure enclosure and openness brimming with uncertainty. We reside "here" – at home, in a sheltered haven, but at the same time our gaze is drawn to "there" – those worlds full of mystery and unrest.





8

1. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior with Easel and Punch Bowl*, no date
 2. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior with Woman Seen from Behind*, 1903-1904
 3. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior. With Piano and Woman in Black*, 1901
 4. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior with a Reading Lady*, no date
 5. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Bedroom*, 1890
 6. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *A Woman Reading by a Window*, no date
 7. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior with Young Man Reading*, 1898
 8. Vilhelm Hammershoi, *The Tall Windows*, 1913
- Vilhelm Hammershoi, *In the Bedroom*, 1896

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a period of growing crises of the heretofore principles of creativity and of approaching artistic revolts and revolutions, art was not conducive for paintings focused on the peace and quiet of home life. The exceptions were the representatives of Intimisme from the circle of the Parisian Nabists, hedonistically fond of bourgeois wellbeing. Another isolated and thus unique exception is the *oeuvre* of the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershoi, until recently forgotten, who remained perfectly indifferent to the transformations of contemporary art. In willingly cultivated isolation he created a totally independent and inimitable art, private and enclosed in a world of its own.

This is to a great measure a women's world, secluded within the home, with a frequent recurrence of the identical motifs of an inhabited interior, empty or with a solitary figure. Both the address and the model are known: the artist portrayed his own flat in an old Copenhagen town house and his wife, with whom spent his whole life with no children. Nonetheless, the imagery appears to be suspended outside a definite time and place. Although in successive paintings we recognise familiar, meticulously rendered details: empty grey walls, white varnished doors, sparse and simple pieces of furniture – the overall impression is that of something closer to a melancholic vision than a concrete interior. Hammershoi built the unusual ambience of his paintings by almost totally depriving them of colour and submerging them in pearly greys, faded beiges and browns contrasted with black and white.

These neat and simple rooms prove to be even more intriguing when we compare them with the interiors of the epoch, which seemed to closely enfold the residents and were full of colourful wallpaper, plush drapes, carpets, soft upholstered sofas, armchairs, chaises longues, pillows, jardinières and bric-a-brac... Instead of profuse decorations we are dealing with ascetic moderation, which harmonises with the painterly form, reduced almost to an architectural drawing. Even the view from the window does not disturb the immaculate, geometric order, and shows identical windows on an opposite wall in a cramped courtyard. The pale sunlight on the floor, seeping through the window bars, has been captured within the rigour of a perspectivistic diagram. Nevertheless, paradoxically, these are not interiors lacking "a woman's touch". Sometimes, there appears in them the unassuming figure of the lady of the house, always dressed in black and turned towards us with her back. In these seemingly cold and impersonal rooms we feel her calm and warm feminine presence, though we never see her face.

Similarly as in the Dutch *interieurs*, in the Hammershoi canvases our role as spectators remains unclear. Captivated, we are nonetheless embarrassed by this admittance to the privacy of a home that is both "being at home" and "for each other", never merely for show. But once again, it is art that offers us the key to a stranger's home, which, fortunately, remains unaffected by our presence.



Vilhelm Hammershoi, *Interior*, 1898

The Studio - the Partially Domesticated, Portable or Transitory Home

Among all the interiors and buildings providing shelter and a dwelling, an artist's studio is by its very function and purpose an ambiguous space. The usefulness of this home is temporary. The roof guarantees an opportunity to work and organise a workshop and provides time for concentration and creative energy. It also makes it possible to safely accumulate various tools or instruments, sketches in the making, auxiliary works – all the projects and seemingly tiresome and yet indispensable papers that surround the artists' effort, which appears somewhat arduous despite the effective results. The roof provides isolation from intruders, noise and visual chaos. Or at least it should do so¹. Nonetheless, artists tend to treat this aspect of the studio as a different, albeit their own, space of clamour and chaos, filled with intruders, who arrive upon the authors' request, by the latter's choice and according to their imagination². On the other hand, a studio roof – to adhere to the concept of elementary space – is not a complete guarantee of home isolation and privacy. After all, an exchange of dimensions and substances is the predominant activity in all types of studios: be they a room open right through, as in a sculptor's studio, or glassed-in, with light coming from the north and set in an attic, from the nineteenth century regarded to be ideal for painters, or even in a small, half-dark *duchytynia* (a cramped *studiolo*), the source of images and concepts, visionary dreams or intellectual ideas. The exchange in question predominantly involves providing the art form with everyday reality. Measurable cubature becomes a springboard for the non-computable space of a painting, the astonishing scale of a sculpture and the conceptual game played with ideas. Essential for artistic endeavours, the commonplace or even unusual objects surrounding the artist (known for a tendency to collect just as many trifles as sophisticated valuables) turn into a part of the substance. The temporariness of a studio becomes consolidated as if in passing, through a transformation of the accidental into the irrevocable and *via* incorporation into the very structure of the work of art^{3 4}. Temporary space often assumes the form of inspiration, a leitmotif identified with this unique place^{5 6}.

The artist's stay and its outcome are intended for the temporary and provisional home due to their very principle and purpose. Artworks are supposed to leave this space, "to go among the people"; they are in motion or destined to be transported⁷. This is the objective of creation. Impermanence, however, often becomes domesticated. And if today (and not only) artworks remain with their author, forcedly congest and domesticate the fleeting and transitory quality of the studio's interior, and do not set off into the world, then they resemble children attached to their parents, growing up and aging with them (even in the best me-

aning of the term) and thus endowing temporary alternation with stabilizing substance. An artist uncertain of the fate of his works – usually non-commissioned – becomes their collector, forced to amass his own output. He transforms the studio into a gallery or a storeroom and grants it the traits of a compulsorily created collection that, even if it is copious, remains rather monotonous because it consists of the works of a single author.

Over a span of years the works held in a studio, settled down and merged with it – even though their relation was supposed to be temporary – provide it with the character of a "creator's home", while the studio as such turns into an "artist's museum" or becomes celebrated as a "temple of art". This description could be appropriate for the family homes of artists sharing the qualities of their bourgeois milieu, such as the Kraków residences of Józef Mehoffer and Wojciech Weiss, professors at the Academy of Fine Arts who, nonetheless, worked in the Academy studios to which they were entitled.

Tales about respectable "homes of creators" and "temples of art" are accompanied by oft-repeated legends of studios conceived as the sites of Bacchic or erotic excesses, witnessing both extraordinary creative momentum and the artist's helplessness or melancholy^{8 9}. Each individual story deserves a legend of its own, and together they all add the myth of extraordinariness to studio space, sometimes reasonably affluent¹⁰ and at other times movingly deprived¹¹. This interior, in which transformation, transgression and creation transpire, remains a legend also today, when the creative act has left the studio for the streets, the walls of graffiti artists or the showrooms, in which it appears in the form of an installation or a performance. It has become a "project", from the beginning to the end commissioned by exhibition or museum curators. Temporariness has become an attribute of the latest works and not of the studio. The physical space of the studio has been replaced with virtual public space. We are far from the materialization of ideas and from preserving the transient.

It would be difficult to avoid discussing the essence of the studio in the People's Republic of Poland during the 1970s and 1980s. Although studios were assigned upon the basis of administrative decisions, due to their aesthetic aura and political extraterritorial status they sometimes assumed the function of asylums of an "another life" in prevailing reality. This fact was particularly appreciated by the art milieu during the martial law period¹². Instead of the natural temporariness of an interior from which the works go further and further into the world, the studio was gaining the qualities of a centre of ideas and meetings – a place of confessions and discussions.

In the past, for instance in the Middle Ages and in the modern era, the artist was frequently a nomad among settled European clients, changing countries and places while searching for the most convenient working conditions. It would be difficult to claim that the traveller took root and settled down in the places of his temporary stay. The example of Pablo Picasso leaving behind successive residences (castles and palaces) filled with his works paradoxically combines the qualities of an established owner and a travelling conjurer. A characteristic trait of this genius, gifted with unmatched creative energy confirmed by fame and financial success, is that his studios both preserved the attributes of a transitory work place and gained the features of a museum collection. Abandoned by the author, they did not lose their links with him.

To what extent is a studio a domesticated space? Probably to the degree that it supports and does not di-

stract the moment of creation when intention changes into a work of art, when for a single instant it merges conditions, time and creative energy and seems to comprise a painting-metaphor of creation. But this metaphor collapses and loses its significance once the studio is perceived as a domesticated dwelling. This is also the case when from the very beginning the artist treats it as an alien and intentionally non-domesticated place. Apparently, such was, and still is Stanisław Wyspiański's abandoned "sapphire studio" in Krowoderska Street in Kraków¹³, probably never inviting or snug. On the contrary, the blue colour of its walls and ceiling lead us outside, into the faraway world, almost into cosmic dimensions, as does the visionary stained glass – merely designed in the studio but fulfilled somewhere else.

Footnote:

- 1 Jacek Gaj, *Visit*
- 2 Jacek Gaj, *At Adam's*
- 3 Zbigniew Szprycha, *Studio*
- 4 Marek Przybył, *Imaginary Portrait of Francis Bacon – Studio*
- 5 Olga Boznańska, *Study of the Artist's Studio in Kraków*
- 6 Wacław Taranczewski, *Young Painter*
- 7 Andrzej Okińczyc, *Packaging*
- 8 Jerzy Mierzejewski, *Studio*
- 9 Jacek Sienicki, *Studio*
- 10 Zbysław Maciejewski, *Studio of Olga Boznańska*
- 11 Antoni Kamieński, *Unfinished Work*
- 12 Barbara Skąpsza, *Night*
- 13 Illustration: photograph by Mirosław Sikorski



Fragment of an exhibition: *Home - the Way of Being*, City Art Gallery in Częstochowa 2009

With obvious effort two men carry into a train carriage a solid, unidentified object. In a moment, the dark shape becomes a recognizable outline of a piano. A voice speaking off screen declares that during the concert tour the train became the artist's home¹. This is said by Piotr Anderszewski, the brilliant Polish pianist, and the frame comes from the documentary film: *Piotr Anderszewski. Voyageur intranquille* by Bruno Monsaingeon.²

In the contemporary world of piano performers Anderszewski is a truly rare figure, transgressing all rules. Keep in mind that this is a world in which various peculiarities are almost a norm. Anderszewski's originality, however, possesses a purely musical dimension. At the age of forty he has already attained the rank of a classic. Actually, his recordings - the majority is phenomenal³ - and stage appearances have elevated him to this status but ultimate "canonisation" was performed by Monsaingeon executing a film portrait. After the excellent *Enigma* with Sviatoslav Richter in the lead role (1998), the innovative portrait of Glenn Gould (*The Alchemist*, 2002), yet another depiction of the Canadian pianist (*Hereafter*, 2005), and a meticulous record of Anderszewski's work on the Beethoven variations (*Piotr Anderszewski Plays Diabelli Variations*, 2007) the French director attempted to bring us closer to the phenomenon of Anderszewski's art in a holistic approach.

Already the very mention of the Polish pianist alongside a list of such significant names is meaningful, showing that Monsaingeon does not bother with just anyone. In his opinion, Anderszewski is absolutely outstanding, a worthy successor of the above-mentioned giants of the piano. Since we are dealing with a totally unconventional figure (beyond the norm - the director says upon several occasions) the film about him simply had to be extraordinary. The director's brief introduction to the concept of the film declares: *This would be a "frontier" film, on the borderline between documentary and fiction. It would be set against a backdrop of a winter journey across Poland, then to Hungary (his two home countries), before traveling to Germany, London, Paris, and finally to Lisbon, where he has recently settled. The chosen means of transport for these meanderings was hardly conventional. Like a modern-day troubadour, Piotr would not travel by airplane or car, but in a private train carriage hired for the purpose, which would be attached to various trains according to an itinerary dictated by places he wished to visit and his concert schedule. To Piotr, the planning of concerts years in advance and the rigid formality of concert halls are constraints that must be overcome in order to restore music's innate vibrancy and escape the relentless treadmill of a touring musician's lifestyle.*

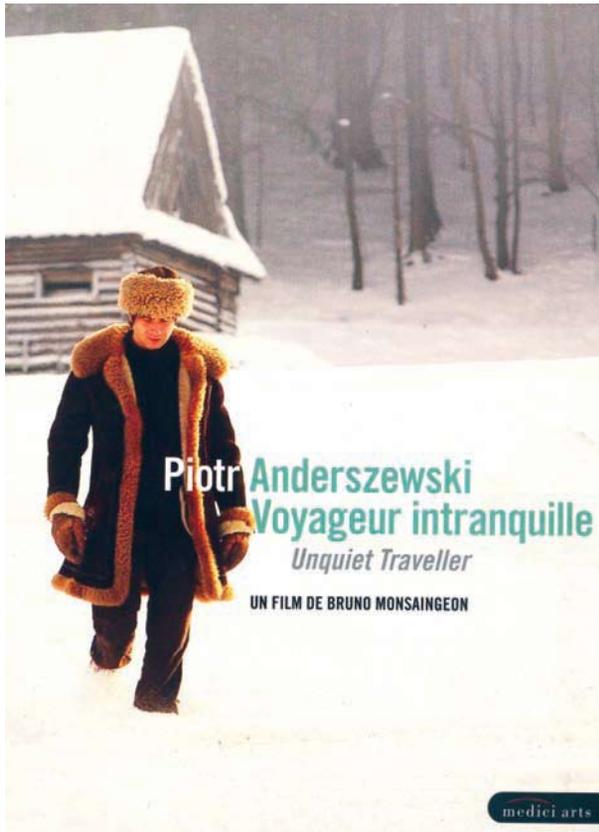
My Mobile Home. The Travelling Artist

For Zbyszek Benedyktowicz

*With a piano installed on board his carriage, Piotr would be able to practise, stopping wherever fancy took him, whether a church, or a village square - places associated with such-and-such a composer. We would unload the equipment required for impromptu recitals to be held at these sites.*⁴

The initial project proposed by the director was accepted by Anderszewski and to a great extent subsequently realised. For several weeks a train carriage became a home, a living room, a work studio, and a means of transport. The result is an extraordinary road movie in which we become acquainted with numerous aspects of the artist. We can, therefore, extract purely musical elements (repertoire, piano technique, musical predilections, remarks on music, etc.). We may also follow fragments referring to family motifs or the cultural root from which the artist emerged. Or, by stressing the fact that we are dealing with a film story we might focus solely on the poetics of the film: to reveal the elements out of which it was construed, to observe the editing technique, and to compare it with other films representing the same genre (two most recent examples: *Helen Grimaud. Living with Wolves*, EMI Classics 2008 and *Leif Ove Andnes. Ballad for Edvard Grieg*, EMI Classics 2008). Finally, already while assessing, we can try to answer the question whether the whole undertaking has been successful and the proposed portrait is convincing.⁵

In the proposed commentary I would like to follow yet another path and to decipher the film slightly differently than the way dictated by the imperative of the genre. To put it as briefly as possible: the point of departure is imposed reality, i.e. an outlined portrait of the artist and thus that, which can be seen (and heard); the subsequent path leads towards discourses more or less obviously inscribed into the film's message. The purpose is to abandon step-by-step concrete images and take a closer look at their reflections, echoes, and associations. To arrive towards amplification understood not only as the expansion (as in the Latin: *amplificare*) but also as the reinforcement (as in the



English: *amplifier*) of particular elements present in the film. I describe the film and the worlds projected by it. Such an interpretation procedure calls for a transition from that, which the film tells us to that about which it tells us. In other words: in order to trace its sense greater importance will be attached to a whole network of meanings and references built above the intentions inscribed into the film than to those intentions as such.

It follows from the above that I would like to treat the Monsiegeon documentary predominantly as a special “cultural text”, a film record composed of assorted semantic ingredients. In the spirit of such an approach I propose the thesis that the documentary can be deciphered not solely (and not so much) as a portrait of an artist as predominantly a story about him. More exactly: about assorted homes, enrooted in actual space and suspended in more subtle space. The Polish and Hungarian home. The homes in Warsaw, Budapest and Lisbon. The processes of leaving and returning home. The search for a home and home-oriented nostalgia. Familiar and foreign spaces. Travelling and roots. Possible worlds – possible places of residence. Literally: about a train carriage temporarily changed into a home. And finally, on the last storey of the film tale there is the home composed of sounds, fleeting musical constructions creating the ethereal but just as real space of a home. In a similar and equally ambiguous sense the film is interpreted by means of a story about residing in its most elementary,

pragmatic meaning connected with theoretical topography, which can be precisely measured by applying geographical or cultural parameters; this is also a story about dwelling, which Martin Heidegger described originally and innovatively while commenting on the famous refrain from Hölderlin: *Full of merit, yet poetically / Humans dwell upon the earth.*⁶

The below presented anthropological commentary will follow two diverse (but somehow complimentary) trajectories of understanding the home and dwelling: individual and general, local and universal, literal and mechanical perspectives. By following this pendulum motion we shall not lose sight of anything that is essential on the literal level; quite possibly, we shall be capable of perceiving something also underneath the narrative surface.

Everything seems to indicate that *Voyageur intranquille* is a film whose plot takes place here and now. Note: despite numerous attributes of the present it seems to have a distinctly anachronic canvas. This feature can be traced on several levels, the first being the most obvious – the level of things. It would be a good thing to realise that the piano and the train, the two prime objects creating film narration, belong to the nineteenth century and refer to the world and mentality of that period. More: the piano and the train are distinguishing marks, especially recognisable emblems of the nineteenth century. Interestingly, the film medium itself is a nineteenth-century invention. Watching this highly contemporary journey of an artist across Europe only after a certain time do we become aware of its anachronic traits. It is quite possible that the unhurried, engrossing narration is not merely a journey in space but also to the innermost recesses of time. The vehicles of this journey are the piano, the train, and film.

First, the piano. This is a special instrument, but only due to its potential of expression. Each piano - it suffices to listen carefully to declarations made by pianists - has its own personality and some sort of an inner mystery. The piano emanates strange energy. Paradoxically, although it recalls and sometimes is compared to a coffin, it lives. This living, almost spiritual aspect of the instrument was cleverly noticed and expanded by Jan Gondowicz in his gloss to *The Piano* by Jane Campion. The majority of reviewers immersed themselves in the meanders of the protagonist’s complicated emotions, forgetting somewhat the titular instrument, which, after all, so perfectly expressed her personality.

No one had taken a closer look at the mythology of the piano. And there is quite a lot to examine. This is the most mysterious of all instruments. The only that irrefutably produces the impression of being a living creature also, or especially, when it remains silent. The massive presence of the piano can be a burden. In

inspires fear in children and distance amongst adults. It subjugates its users spiritually. It is a demanding creature and cannot bear dampness, cold and uneven temperature. Neglected, it groans ominously and momentarily becomes out of tune. In a word, it comprises the object of a cult. It accepts offerings in the shape of hours spent on Gradus ad Parnassum and Kunst der Fingerfertigkeit.

*The piano moulds personality. Not by means of art but via life. Everyone who had a piano carried up to the fifth floor or whose window was stormed by a crane, who tolerated complaining neighbours and was forced to share his humble living space will immediately confirm this opinion. The piano enforces a certain style: every day, for hours, one does not chat, listen to the radio, drink tea or smoke, but sits and plays. It is tremendously expensive – pianists claim that one has only a single piano in a lifetime. A costly work of art, it requires servicing as if it were a delicate machine. Even loftiest spirits do not shy from the tuner's crank and tinkers with the hammer mechanism. Finally, the piano demands strength. In order to set into motion in a chromatic etude the Bösendorfer keyboard or the magnificent Broad wood, portrayed in the film (but even more resistant) one becomes covered in sweat after half a minute. In a word: a strong character is needed to deal with a piano.*⁷

The essayist also aptly indicated the totally non-contemporary nature of the piano in present-day culture, its affiliation to the lost archipelago of the nineteenth century: *The piano, a sacred object of nineteenth-century culture, symbolizes it just as the automobile symbolizes the twentieth century. This is a symbol that concentrates the entire gravity of the past century. A period when objects were respected and even worshipped. Hence it is obvious what a defenestration of a piano could have signified for Norwid or how striking the instrument with an axe must have been a sacrilege of sorts in Champion's film. A Europeanised version of: "If there is no God than everything is allowed". First and foremost, this is the reason why the transference of a piano into a wild natural environment must have constituted the summit of extravagant imagination.*⁸

True, the piano not only lives and easily and readily succumbs to personification, but seen from the viewpoint of contemporary mentality it appears to be a recognizable messenger of the world of the past. This is a world of non-extant aristocratic salons, obligatory piano playing conceived as part of good upbringing, the nineteenth-century novel in which the piano becomes an essential utensil in fictional space. Only an awareness of this distinguished position of the nineteenth-century piano makes it possible to comprehend the meaning of the sardonic remark made by Emil Cioran about Chopin raising the piano to the statute of tuberculosis⁹, or to understand the reason why the remains of Giacomo Puccini were laid to rest in a piano standing in his villa in Torre del Lago.¹⁰

More, the piano, it turns out, is such a specific and curious organism that it finds it difficult to establish relations with contexts other than those sanctioned by means of cultural customs (salon or concert hall). For certain reasons (shape? size? "personality"?) it is not suited for other spaces, in particular open ones. Placed in them, it creates a clearly eccentric combination with the closest surrounding. In this case, the dissonance is based on a contrast between artful/natural, but apparently is not reduced to it. This is probably the reason why such an impact is exerted upon our imagination by the phrase from Rimbaud's *Illuminations: Madame *** set up a piano in the Alps.*¹¹ This is also the reason why the famous scene from *Un Chien Andalou* – a piano dragged along a road (and serving as a coffin for a rotting cadaver of a donkey) – leaves such a strong imprint. The same is true of the image of a piano on a New Zealand beach in Champion's film. Quite possibly, this is also why from of passable documentary film about Grieg (mentioned above and featuring the Norwegian pianist Andsnes) we so easily recall the scene with the pianist playing on a mountaintop. The Monsaingeon film based on an only slightly less eccentric conception – a piano on a train – adding another chapter to this Surrealistic mythology. In this case, the dissonance attains a high/low form. A valuable, technically and aesthetically sophisticated object, an emblem of high culture has been placed in a popular, commonplace, and universally used mode of transport. Food for thought is provided by the fact that in both cases this symmetry and dissonance, albeit first acting as a source of aesthetic shock, do not cease to fascinate and attract.

Leaving the train and addressing people awaiting him at a Poznań train station the pianist admits that he loves moving about by train, his current home. The scene, in the manner of a somewhat comical (flowers, welcoming speeches, cameras) and probably unintentional remake of *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* by Louis Lumière, recalls the vehicle in which the pianist travels. Anderszewski obviously likes this form of travelling. He declares that he enjoys the very chance to travel without any responsibility for the voyage; travelling by train is a special form of freedom: everything takes place in constant motion, with not effort on the part of the passenger. Nothing depends on the passenger who is incapable of making decisions, and all responsibility is borne by the train driver. Apparently, the train *tournee* was not the pianist's one-time extravagance indulged for the sake of the film. Anderszewski reveals a predilection for voyages of this sort. In one of his interviews, he declared: *By way of example, last year I hired a Gierek-era private carriage and together with my friends travelled across the whole of Poland, from Cracow to the Hel peninsula, although we actually bypassed Hel since a drunken depot worker forgot*



Piotr Anderszewski

to detach our carriage. For hours we stood in a snowy field. This was an absolutely wonderful experience. Or when we made our way through fog lifting above a side track, to find ourselves in the market square of Zamość....¹² At the same time, we learn what sort of travelling is Anderszewski's favourite. In this case, the heart of the matter obviously does not involve ordinary travelling, a thoughtless devouring of space but savouring it. Perhaps one could even say: contemplation of the landscape, if this did not sound so exalted...

Film narration follows the rhythm of the train carriage, with stopovers for piano recitals. The role played by the train is particularly interesting. Carrying valuable cargo, it is filmed in assorted ways: in static close settings – on railway stations or in dynamic takes – in the course of the journey. Generally, however, the train is filmed in motion. Changing frames show the way in which it traverses space. There is no need to read the writings of Paul Virile (monographist and diagnostician of contemporary forms of acceleration) to be quite certain that one of the essential aspects of contemporaneity – perhaps the most consciously experienced – is speed. Terror of speed, rapid changes, all-embracing motion – these are the living and irremovable components of daily experience. What is the source, then, of the earlier proclaimed anachronic nature of railway transport and the train as such? Everything depends on the point of reference. Characteristically, some 150 years ago the railway was regarded as the avant-garde of progress, preceding its time (recall the enthusiasm radiating from Turner's brilliant: *Rain, Steam and Speed. The Great Western Railway*, 1844). More: the railway belonged entirely to the future. The train won the race against the horse carriage. Today, however, compared to the speed attained by an airplane or even an automobile the conventional train proves to be relatively slower. The problem, however, does not lie in measurable numbers.

In the domain of mentality and collective imagination – and it is they that are predominantly the object of our interest – the train envisaged as a tool for displacement is, and shall remain, a mode of locomotion from the past, regardless of the incidental attainments of TGV. This anachronic feature is discernible particularly when we look at it from the viewpoint of railway mythology: both the one associated with the technological taming of space, when the train symbolised a triumph of *ratio* over untamed Nature (a motif often accentuated in Westerns), and the one linked with literature, when railway tracks became the arena of existential dramas, to mention the *casus* of Anna Karenina. After all, already the legend of the Orient Express – the very essence of a train above all others – could serve as convincing proof. The first trip from Paris to Constantinople was made by this wonderful vehicle (known as the Titanic on tracks) in 1883. In

the wake of wartime turmoil, problems with borders, and a gradual reduction of the timetable, the last journey along the original route took place in 1977. The still preserved legend is a combination of elements referring (probably) to the past: aristocratic loftiness, Parisian chicque, Arabian exotica, the flavour of adventure, not mention the sensational aura of *Murder on the Orient Express* ... Paradoxically, failed attempts made from time to time to reanimate its fame indicate that the era of the Orient Express has already passed.

Although this might seem strange within the context of the explosion of speed, more: the deification of speed in the present-day world, the train with its measured rhythm and relatively low moving remains in the past. Intuition did not deceive Monsaingeon when he decided to place his protagonist in a train carriage. He has our total approval: a contemporary troubadour cannot – and certainly should not – travel in an aeroplane.

In its capacity as a nineteenth-century time machine the train is almost naturally linked with the cinema. Connections between the train and film – a motif deserving a separate presentation – are discernible from the very beginnings of the cinematic arts. Not by accident was one of first Lumière miniatures the aforementioned *L'arrivée d'un train*. Theoreticians from that period were well aware that the cinematographer displays its abilities best when he shows motion. Recommended themes for filming mention first and foremost the train. In the awareness of the spectators those two phenomena appeared simultaneously. In an excellent article about the presence of the train in earliest cinematic accomplishments Yuri Tsivyan cited a fragment from the first issue of "Cine-Phono" from 1907: *Luminous pictures were first shown more or less fifteen years ago and the impression they produced were so great that everyone, thinking about this amazing wonder, recalls the time when he first saw a rushing train.*¹³ Does the passenger sitting inside a train carriage not perceive the window showing shifting images as similar to a film screen? The *motion pictures* offered by the cinema and the moving pictures seen from a train window are distinctly close; this strange isomorphism offers much food for thought.

3.

Considered from the construction (and not chronological) perspective *Voyageur intranquille* is composed of two – not quite matching – parts. The first encompasses factographic details from Anderszewski's life, and the second concerns reflections about the essence of music. They interweave in assorted proportions, from time to time surprising each other.

The biographical part places special emphasis on the artist's Polish and Hungarian origin, with distinct stress on local Polish specificity. This is the weakest

link, with the pianist reading off screen an earlier written text full of insufferable and exalted clichés about the torn apart and tormented country, “murdered and violated Warsaw”, Slavonic soul in an “ideally cut Parisian suit” (about Chopin’s music). Fortunately, from time to time there appears a counterpoint, as in the excellent scene in which Anderszewski gazes at the distant Palace of Culture and Science and describes it, obviously, as a horrible symbol of Soviet captivity, while an accompanying friend, Maciej Grzybowski (also a pianist), comments in much simpler terms by complaining about the Stalinis phallus and immediately disarming the martyrological narration.¹⁴

All this recalls in places an educational film composed of multi-use building blocks. Looking, however, at the frames not from an evaluating but a descriptive, anthropological viewpoint one might perceive in those weak points or slip-ups something extremely interesting: the long duration of national stereotypes. It becomes clear that the vision of Poland, the Poles, and Polishness both in the story told by the pianist and in the film narration as such possesses all the features of a mythological construction. Interestingly, they supplement each other and seen from a basically inner perspective (Anderszewski) Poland matches the martyrological vantage point, with Polish mentality becoming part of the tearful and sentimental Slavonic soul.¹⁵ In turn, judging by the excessive snow-filled frames Poland viewed from an external perspective (Monsaingeon) is a land of eternal winter and persistent snowfalls. This film version of *Winterreise* (with pastoral frames distant from the dramatic ambiance of Schubert’s cycle) is photogenic but from the cognitive point of view it only reinforces old stereotypes. One could have the impression that while portraying Poland the director remained true to an image cultivated in seventeenth-century France. It was then that there emerged a vision of Poland encased in permanent cold winters (as in the poem by Philippe Desportes, in which Poland is *toujours de neige et de glace couverte*), as well as of the constantly inebriated Pole.¹⁶ Having seen the film, the Western public will reaffirm its conviction that there is only a single season in Poland (winter almost predominates in the film¹⁷) and that the Poles learn to drink ice-cold vodka (the pianist offers it to his guests in the train carriage) together with mother’s milk ...

Fortunately, Anderszewski appears in the film also as a citizen of the world and certainly as a European. His home expands and transgresses far beyond Polish or Hungarian borders. Not by accident does his journey start on the (just as mythologized) eastern borderlands of the Continent and ends in Lisbon along the ocean coast. The pianist does not forget about his roots but clearly cultivates an everlasting imperative of seeking a home, home-oriented nostalgia, space in

which he will be able to truly live without limiting the meaning of this verb to a merely physical dimension. Lisbon, he adds, is a successive, essential step along this path: the greatness of Lisbon is its past, while its decadence and greatness have collapsed. This is the noble feature of the town, where the pianist strolls for hours down its streets, observing everyday, small-scale dramas and the theatre of life. In doing so, he experiences being pierced by the local, strange silence. More, he feels at home, an emotion that grants him inner peace. Anderszewski sees Lisbon as the town of the eternal voyager. This is a truly feminine and maternal town, in the shape of a mother’s belly. Hence the feeling of safety and distance from the great world.

This statement contains significant ambivalence, as if a faraway echo of the words uttered by the pianist at the beginning of the film when he mentioned his fear of motionlessness and longing for incessant motion. Anderszewski is always on the road, in constant motion, but at the same time he searches for a place to settle down. He is a nomad, but a rather strange one with the distinct syndrome of the domiciled person. Interestingly, this intimate confession also contains the earlier mentioned anachronic motif. Anderszewski seems to be not living in the present and he looks back, towards the past. Hence the attention paid to pre-war Warsaw (his birthplace and a town granted particular significance in his private mythology) and the passion for Lisbon, today slightly provincial, whose splendour is already part of a distant past.¹⁸ In his metaphorical characteristic of Lisbon Anderszewski animates the feminine, maternal topos. He envisages the town as an expansive home comprehended predominantly as a friendly and secure cosmos (Lisbon – my home! - he could have echoed Fernando Pessoa¹⁹, enamoured of his birthplace), with its most perfect personification: the image of a maternal belly. Here, the town-home assumes clearly feminine features.

4.

So far, I have used the French title of the film: *Voyageur intranquille*. Actually, this is the version that appears most often in promotion material or sales offers. The film, however, and this is noteworthy and significant, has titles also in other languages, with the English *Unquiet Traveller* being semantically close. The German title, although already without the adjective, is similar: *Wanderer ohne Ruhe*. Only the Polish version differs considerably from the one in three Western languages: *Podróżujący fortepian* (The Travelling Piano). Agreed, this is not a precise translation of the French original: in Polish the traveller is not someone but something. The pianist has vanished, leaving behind only his instrument.

Is this a translational lapsus, the carefree work of a translator, or a subconscious exchange? It would

be difficult to propose an unambiguous answer. Apparently, the lexical and thus - this is particularly significant! – semantic exchange contains something of great importance. Ascertaining this obvious feature I am concerned not merely with the fact that – if one were to treat comments on the modelling role played by the title seriously - *voyageur intranquille* produces an entirely different reception of the film among the French spectators than a *travelling piano* among the Polish audience. In the first case emphasis has been placed on the artist (together with the entire luggage of associations connected with voyages and travelling as well as its literal and metaphorical connotations), while in the second case the title abandons the person and concentrates primarily on the instrument he plays. This circumstance appears, at first glance, to be obvious and does not require in-depth commentaries. A closer look, however, discloses a greater complexity of the issue since it transcends considerably beyond the domain of linguistics and translational competence.

In other words, I propose the thesis that the Polish version of the title did not appear by accident. More, that it is not semantically innocent but, on the contrary, significant. In addition, it carries references to Polish historical memory, predominantly literary. One might have the impression that the past, stored in the language, exerted a strong impact on the author (authors?) of the Polish title. It is, after all, impossible not to discern in the phrase: "travelling piano" - in addition, within the context of the art represented by the Polish pianist and Chopin's music in particular - a shadow of an association with the earlier-mentioned *Fortepian Szopena* by Norwid. First and foremost: with the most dramatic scene in which the tsarist authorities hurled the instrument from a window of the Zamoyski Palace in 1863, the year of the January insurrection.

But this simple observation, albeit slightly enhancing the reception of the film, does not end similarities between *Podróżujący fortepian* and *Fortepian Szopena*. There is a single reservation: we have to liberate the poem from the intrusive patriotic mask added by customary school textbook interpretations. Contrary to usual associations, Norwid's poem remains above all routine simplifications. On the contrary, it represents dense meaning, full of things left unsaid, uncertainties, abruptly broken phrases, and sudden silence. For this reason, its interpretation is extremely capacious.²⁰ Apart from the patriotic stratum, the most legible and easiest to grasp, Norwid's text is also a poignant reflection, or perhaps even better: meditation on art and its essence. The point of departure is Chopin's brilliant music. Here is a brief fragment:

O You! In whom Love's Profile chooses to abide
And Art's Perfection is your name –

You! who assemble in the ranks of Style
And fashion stone, penetrate the song's refrain ...²¹

It is precisely in this poetic attempt at naming the essence of music, despite all the obvious differences, that the poem comes close to Anderszewski's film narration.²² After all, his commentary contains an intensely Polish motif (one could even say with a certain dose of sarcasm: one with a moving-martyrological twist). Not only does it mention Chopin and his music but – and within the context of Norwid's text this is even more interesting - it also formulates deeply conceived sentences about the art of playing the piano, pertaining additionally to a question whose verbalisation remains extremely difficult: the essence of music or perhaps of art in general.

The title, however, resonates in the memory of the Polish spectator due to yet another reference. Suffice to take into consideration a fragment of the film in which Anderszewski speaks about the unprecedented wartime destruction ("murder") of Warsaw. The film illustrates this touching and extremely emotional narration with documentary photographs of buildings razed to the ground and ruins. Looking at those images it is simply impossible not to revoke a certain meaningful fragment of *Pianist* by Władysław Szpilman. Recall: at the end of the war the titular artist is taken by surprise in an empty, abandoned house by a German officer and in order to validate his profession is forced to play the piano. The surrealism of this extraordinary scene mingles with the horror of war.²³

Recalling those associations, obvious for the Polish recipient, we start to understand that the documentary's Polish title is not quite as absurd as it might seem at first. Apparently, by replacing the neutral and bland "traveller" with "piano" the title resonates well with certain fragments of Polish memory. Another significant fact is that both cited works match Anderszewski's narration with its strongly accentuated martyrological overtone.

5.

Anderszewski without doubt lives within music and for music. Interestingly: his statements about extra-musical themes tend to be gushing but those dealing with music are pure factuality. In the majority of cases he speaks about music using the technical language of an artisan, and it is difficult to treat occasional anecdote-illustration inserts otherwise than in the categories of a joke.

What does this mean? As briefly as possible: we are dealing with concentration on music as such, its architectural essence and not artistic expression. Performance, as envisaged by the artist, does not consist of an expressive addition to music but organically stems from it. It must do so! In the case of Anderszewski this means laborious, analytical, and archaeological

(i.e. observing the strata) work on a composition. He dissects it into particular individual molecules and re-arranges them into “a new order” so as to disclose as much as possible of that, which is inside the notes and between them. Yes, *la musique avant toute chose...*

The film contains remarkable scenes making it possible to observe the manner in which the pianist reads the rough score. Anderszewski plays a certain fragment, singing its main melodic line and, at the same time, commenting *a vista* its “conceptual” content. Doing so, he reveals its inner logic and the necessity of concrete sounds. Take the example of the extraordinary *Barcarolle* by Chopin: the first few opening notes (resembling a dish of pasta), several successive sounds (the song of a drunken gondolier), a slight pause, as if to listen more carefully to the phrase (which despite all remains beautiful), followed by a grimace (in the fashion of a bad French chanson) to arrive at the end line, with Anderszewski commenting on Chopin’s complicated nature. A music object-lesson in a nutshell.

6.

In an introduction to his *The Predicament of Culture*, a book that at its time was a breakthrough in anthropological reflection, James Clifford wrote: *This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labour, immigration, urban sprawl. More and more people “dwell” with the help of mass transit, automobiles, airplanes. (...) An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth.*²⁴

This text comes from 1988. In an article written a few years later - *Travelling Cultures* (referring to certain motifs in the book) - Clifford returned to a changed comprehension of residing and travelling in the contemporary world. The text contains several fragments taken from literature. Symptomatically, their prime object is the hotel conceived as space-time reflecting the spirit of modernity. There appears a fragment from Conrad’s *Victory*, known from *The Predicament of Culture* (*the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel*), but also a phrase from *Tristes Tropiques*, in which the anthropologist described a dive in the Brazilian small town of Goiania, which he saw as a symbol of civilizational barbarity (*a place of transit, not of residence*).²⁵ Hotels are places through which we only pass and in which all meetings are fleeting and accidental. They are legible signs of the contemporary lack of enrootment, mobility and superficial contacts...

It would be a good thing to place Monsaingeon’s film and in particular the figure of the constantly travelling protagonist against the backdrop of those declarations. The opening statement, deprived of an

anthropological commentary, could appear rather trivial and not at all obvious; it lists assorted places of residence: Warsaw, Budapest, Lyon, Strasbourg, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Lisbon... Transition in space as a form of existence. In the fascinating (but also tedious) mobile world in which such transitions are a norm we are all émigrés on the road and in some way not at home. It could be sensible to ask: who is the artist in such a hotel community, always on the move in all directions? In what way does he differ (if such is the case) from other nomads?

Anderszewski, just as almost every present-day musician, is a travelling artist, a constant voyager.²⁶ The film accentuates the condition of the artist-traveller, a restless spirit, a man on the road, always drifting, never permanently enrooted, living out of a suitcase in rented apartments. Once again: what is the contemporary musician? A traveller? A tourist? A vagrant? A nomad? And the really essential question: is his homelessness a mere particle of a wider phenomenon or is it qualitatively different?

Before I attempt to suggest a certain answer to those questions here is another brief comment from Clifford’s study on “travelling”. Reflecting on the operativeness of the conceits applied by sciences dealing with culture he examined the contents of such terms as: “travel”, “displacement”, or “nomadism”. At one point, Clifford noted surprisingly: “Pilgrimage” seems to me a more interesting comparative term to work with. It includes a broad range of Western and non-Western experiences and is less class—and gender-biased than “travel”. Moreover, it has a nice way of subverting the constitutive modern opposition between traveller and tourist.²⁷

Taking into account the above (as well as gathering together certain earlier motifs) it appears quite apt to suggest that if the musician is actually a voyager then he is a special sort of traveller, *homo irrequietus* (according to the formula suggested by St. Augustine), who in his activity and calling comes close to the status of a pilgrim. This holds true particularly for the interpretation bequeathed by Norwid in his celebrated poem:

*Above all estates there is the estate of estates,
A tower above flat houses
Piercing the clouds ...*

*You think that I am not the Lord
Because my moveable home
Is of camel hide ...
...*

*But I abide in the bosom of the sky,
While it seizes my soul
Like a pyramid!*

*But I too have as much of the earth
As is covered by my foot.*



Piotr Anderszewski

As long as I walk! ...²⁸

The suggested musician-pilgrim parallel requires appropriate comprehension. Naturally, this attempt at placing the artist in a quasi-religious context does not have in mind the common understanding of religiosity. It is rather concerned with stressing the importance of the task undertaken by the artist and the significance of the work he performs. In a roundabout way this leads to a more profound grasp of the formula openly mentioned by Anderszewski in the film: being a musician is not a profession, it is a calling. In other words - what is it? The elementary meaning of this slightly forgotten connotation - especially in reference to creativity - is excellently recalled by Wiesław Juszczak:

*It is not I who decides about calling, its type and direction, but vocation itself: a force that sometimes appears to be internal but whose actual source is outside, and which delineates my path. This force is the reason why I am compelled to pursue a given path, to follow it regardless of obstacles and to always wish to walk down it. The destination of such a striving can be, therefore, conceived as a centre from which this force emanates and which is the source of the voice calling me. The fact that I am supposed to, and want to go towards that voice means that the road is endless. It also signifies that the goal of my striving is "for all practical purposes" unattainable. The limitlessness of roaming in a state of calling, wandering towards the target of that calling and, simultaneously, the source is decisive for the freedom of each such path. In other words: the level of the objective determines the measure of freedom. This measure constantly grows and the potential of vastness is just as continuously revealed to us.*²⁹

These words cast a light on the feeling, stressed upon several occasions by Anderszewski, of being compelled to be a pianist, some sort of a force, an inner imperative that "urged" him to devote himself to playing. Within this context words about an overwhelming and incessant wish to strive towards a performance absolute gain greater importance. Without that commentary they could appear to be pretentious and empty. In both cases - the pilgrim and the artist - it is precisely the path that appears to be the true objective and particularly a renewed but never totally satisfactory effort to attain the selected goal. Another characteristic feature is the reversal of customary signs: settling down is not a value in itself and homelessness does not have a negative qualification. This state of weightlessness, typical for both, and of perennial being on the road are probably the price paid for attempting to attain the objective, which - once again in both instances - possesses the nature of a vanishing horizon.

7.

Remarks about the pilgrim's condition of the artist-musician lead us to the last stratum of reflections,

i.e. meanings that without doubt exist although it is difficult to describe and verbalise them precisely. If a musician does not have a home, if his home is mobile (although today it assumes another form: a comfortable train carriage rather than camel hide sandals), if he is sometimes tormented by a feeling of being rootless and homeless then where is his true home? After all, it has to exist somewhere. It appears that resolving this question is neither difficult nor particularly sophisticated. This home is - must be! - art. In the case of Anderszewski: it is music. Such a solution, however, lures with its obviousness and is not at all that simple as it could appear at first glance. We arrive here at a successive curious paradox connected with the two basic parameters amidst which we exist: time and space.

There is no doubt that the home - regardless of the architectural forms it assumes - both in its commonplace semantics and in more sophisticated languages is predominantly a cryptonym of that, which is permanent, immobile, steadfast, and lastingly enrooted in topographic reality but also in a wider, symbolic and spiritual reality. Meanwhile, how does music exist? Regardless of refined responses to this difficult question one thing appears to be certain: music exists in time. To put in stronger terms, it exists in disappearance and reduction, i.e. it is and, at the same time, it seems not to be, it exists in motion and gradual vanishing. (*Tout note doit finir en mourant*, Marin Marais says in the film: *Tous le matins du monde* by Alain Corneau). It exists, but temporarily, in passing time. Its ontology is curiously fragile and its existence - almost phantom. But despite its nature variable in time it remains - and this is probably the greatest paradox of the musical element - just as real. For many of those who live for the sake of music this is the only reality! Nonetheless, taking the common sense approach, so-called musical space - to cite this routine expression, paradoxical in the context of the earlier comments - is a conspicuous antithesis of the idea of the home, i.e. something tangible, concrete, and mundane. In exact terms, music does not exist. Nor can it be identified with any sort of "space", unless within the limits of linguistic metaphor. It is the outcome of sounds temporarily enrooted in time, in ever-changing rhythmic, melodic and harmonious configurations. It is thus a phenomenon designating pure change, while the idea of the home contains the essence of durability. Music thus understood as a variable, disappearing, unreal phenomenon composed of time would be an antithesis of the home, conceived as a firm and truly existing reality.

Is it possible, therefore, to reside within music? And what would this mean? Can music - however understood - be a home? Is it possible to build on sand? And does music really have to be/is an antithesis of the home?

Let us for a moment listen carefully to a intriguing fragment of *The Sonnets to Orpheus* by Rilke, an author who was probably the closest to describing the enigmatic reality of music, a sphere that radically exceeds and resists the word:

*But for us, existence is still enchanted;
in any number of places, it is still the origin. A playing
of pure forces untouched except by one who kneels in
wonder.*

*Words still serenely approach the unsayable. . .
And music, ever new, out of the most trembling
stones, builds her home in those regions least usable.*³⁰

Anderszewski's personal story about music appears to follow this line of thinking. Although it is pure disappearance, music in its most perfect symptoms builds permanent, albeit airborne constructions. Created out of unsteady elements it arranges itself into spaces that resemble a home in which one wants to reside. More: those musical "stones", albeit in constant motion, are arranged into a special home recalling holy space. This is the particularly striking feature of the cited fragment: a solid and permanent structure is built out of "trembling stones". Such a home, ostensibly fleeting, strongly opposes the reality ("barren emptiness") of the world, in which we lead our daily lives and which we perceive routinely as the only existing one. Apparently, musical constructions, albeit fluid, merging and disintegrating in time, are stronger and more complete than quite a few real homes.

Anderszewski holds several works of the assorted composers he performs in particular esteem. Four names reappear in the film: naturally, Chopin (whom he knows best of all and plays in small doses because they are too delicate), Mozart (whose works are the most poignant and probably the most extreme in their ambiguity), Brahms (whose will to attain perfection is an obstacle in which the pianist sees himself) and, obviously, the towering *pater familias*, Jan Sebastian Bach (working on *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* Anderszewski was under the impression that he was facing an opened book of eternity). These are, at the same time, musical homes to live in: Home-Chopin (associated closely with the motherland), Home-Brahms (linked first and foremost with the masculine element), Home-Mozart (basically infantile but also the most ambiguous: light-dark, sad-joyous, divine-impertinent) and the perhaps most capacious Home-Bach (with the beautiful metaphor of a book) opening up onto eternity.

Anderszewski proves above all doubt that it is possible to reside within music, although this is a special home devoid of foundations, underpinning, walls and roof. A mobile home made of time and ethereal sound. Nonetheless, it is just as real. Anderszewski's confessions produce the endless feeling that despite all the

objections formulated by common sense there exists something not unlike "musical space" and that this possibly imperfect metaphor becomes concrete before our eyes (and ears). In other words: that it really becomes a space to inhabit and can become a real home despite the fact that – let us repeat – the phenomenon of music as if radically negates the essence of a domestic continuum.

Listening to Anderszewski performing Chopin or, in particular, Mozart, especially when in the course of playing he comments aloud the essence of the music, one has the irresistible impression that we are watching and hearing someone who has found himself in domesticated, native space. Who, as the ambiguous English expression has it, is *at home* and thus is an expert on what he does but also, quite ordinarily, is home.

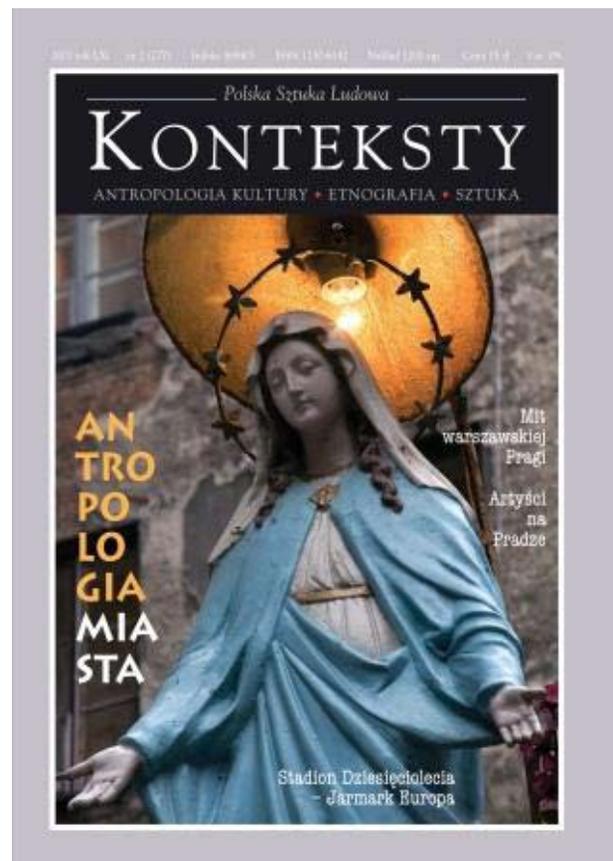
Endnotes

- ¹ All statements by the pianist are based on the film soundtrack.
- ² B. Monsaingeon, *Piotr Anderszewski. Voyageur intranquille*, Medici Arts International 2008.
- ³ L. van Beethoven – *Diabelli variations*, 2001, W. A. Mozart – *The Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major*, K. 467, *The Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor*, K. 491, 2002, J. S. Bach – I, III and VI *Partita*, 2002, F. Chopin – *Ballades, Mazurkas, Polonaises* 2003, K. Szymanowski – *Piano Sonata No. 3, Métopes, Masks*, 2005, W. A. Mozart – *The Piano Concerto No. 17 in G major*, KV. 453 and *The Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor*, K. 466, 2006, L. van Beethoven – *Bagatelle*, op. 126 and *Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major* Op. 15, 2008, *Piotr Anderszewski at Carnegie Hall - Bach, Schumann, Janáček, Beethoven, Bartók*, 2009.
- ⁴ B. Monsaingeon, *Piotr Anderszewski – Unquiet Traveller*, booklet added to a DVD, pp. 6-7.
- ⁵ The film received the Gold Medal in the music and performing arts category at the French Festival International des Programmes Audiovisuels in Biarritz (2009). It was also awarded in the best artist's portrait category at Festival International du Film sur l'Art (FIFA) in Montreal (2009).
- ⁶ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Poetically Dwells Man...*, in: idem, *Odczyty i rozprawy*, transl. J. Mizera, Kraków 2002.
- ⁷ J. Gondowicz, *Romans z fortepianem*, "Kino" no. 4:1994, p. 29.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ E. Cioran, *Aforizmy*, selected, transl. and prep. J. Ugniewska, Warszawa 1993, p. 33.
- ¹⁰ Puccini buried himself – or was buried – in (or near) an object that commemorates him and symbolizes his oeuvre - a piano; M. Leiris, *Operratics*, transl. G. Bennett, København-Los Angeles 2001. Puccini died in 1924, but his mentality belonged to the nineteenth century.
- ¹¹ A. Rimbaud, *Wiersze. Sezon w piekle. Iluminacje. Listy*, selected and prep. A. Międzyrzeczki, various translators, p. 201.
- ¹² *Biedny Chopin. Rozmowa z pianistą Piotrem Anderszewskim*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 22 December 2003.
- ¹³ Y. Tsivyan, *O symbolice pociągu w początkowym okresie kina*, in: *Sztuka w świecie znaków*, selected, trans., introd. and bibliography B. Żyłko, Gdańsk 2002, p. 198.
- ¹⁴ I have seen Monsaingeon's film several times and am

certain that the most unbearable in Anderszewski's statements is not the content but the way in which he speaks. The emphatic mannerism with which he says the earlier written sentences is the reason why his voice becomes slightly artificial, a contrast with his natural and unaffected behaviour.

- 15 This one-sidedness and stereotype nature of declarations comes even more as a surprise considering that in his other statements Anderszewski's attitude to Polish issues is highly ambiguous, at least in his declarations: "I left Poland already after secondary school and all told spent less time here than anywhere else. There are different types of enrootment, however, and this is why I feel closely liked with this country, especially due to my upbringing by my father and paternal grandmother, which had an enormous impact on my sister and me. I am extremely attached to Poland and, at the same time, pathologically anti-Polish. Gombrowicz represented a similar attitude, right? At least in this particular case I can identify with him", *Porządek i ogień. Z Piotrem Anderszewskim rozmawia Patrycja Kujawska*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" no. 43:2009, p. 34. It is worth recalling that Monsaigneon's film was addressed predominantly to the Western audience, hence Anderszewski's narration is inscribed so strongly, almost ostentatiously into routine anticipations.
- 16 A convincing analysis of the origin of such images (and their obstinate presence in French contemporary thought) was conducted by Ludwik Stomma in one of the chapters of his book: *Wzloty i upadki królów Francji sposobem antropologicznym wyłożone*, Łódź 1991, pp.155-161. Quotation from Desportes after: Stomma, p. 158.
- 17 Recall those two images: the artist together with his sister-violinist, wearing stylish sheepskin coats and dashing in a sleigh across snow-smothered Zakopane or the solitary pianist traversing a winter landscape.
- 18 It is precisely this feature of Lisbon (marginality, provinciality) that, next to its poignant beauty, was accentuated by Mircea Eliade, yet another resident of the city, who spent the war in the Portuguese capital and who mentioned the magnificent and unforgettable square at the mouth of the Tag as well as the omnipresent white and blue colours. In the evenings the streets resounded with music and singing. The overall impression was that of a town outside the range of history, in particular current history – beyond the reach of the hell of war. M. Eliade, *Próba labiryntu. Rozmowy z Claude-Henri Rocquetem*, transl. K. Środa, Warszawa 1992, p. 85.
- 19 F. Pessoa, *Księga niepokoju Bernardo Soaresa pomocnika księgowego w Lizbonie*, transl. M. Lipszyc, Izabelin 2007, p. 73.
- 20 Suffice to delve into the detailed and multi-sided analysis of the text written by Władysław Stróżewski; cf. W. Stróżewski, *Doskonale – wypełnienie. O „Fortepianie Szopena”*, in: idem, *Istnienie i wartość*, Kraków 1981, pp. 181-214.
- 21 C. K. Norwid, *Fortepian Szopena*, in: Norwid, *Dzieła wybrane. Wiersze*, Warszawa 1980, vol. 1, p. 498.
- 22 This is an appropriate moment to stress the quasi-cinematic approach used by Norwid, to which attention has been drawn by Stróżewski in a brilliant exegesis of the poem: *Everything appears in a distinctly marked perspective, in close-ups or long shots, as if as a result of working with a camera, which brings the depicted objects closer or relegates them to the background*, Stróżewski, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

- 23 W. Szpilman, *Pianista. Warszawskie wspomnienia 1939-1945*, introd. and prep. A. Szpilman, afterword W. Bierman, Kraków 2000, p. 168 (the book is supplemented by an appendix: W. Hosenfeld, *Fragmenty pamiętnika*).
- 24 J. Clifford, *Kłopoty z kulturą. Dwudziestowieczna etnografia, literatura i sztuką*, various translators, Warszawa 2000, p. 21.
- 25 J. Clifford, *Traveling Cultures*, in: *Cultural Studies*, ed. and introd. L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. A. Treichler, New York-London 1992, p. 96.
- 26 This travelling feature of the condition of the contemporary musician appears in numerous statements made by artists. The great pianist Sviatoslav Richter responded outright to the remark that he gives concerts not only in great metropolises but also small localities: *I am a voyager. I find every locality on a map interesting, be it large or small*, E. Kofin, *Ich słowa*, Wrocław 2009, p. 16.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 28 C. K. Norwid, *Pielgrzym*, in: Norwid, op. cit., p. 376.
- 29 W. Juszcak, *Słowo o powołaniu*, in: idem, *Fragmenty*, Warszawa 1995, p. 82.
- 30 R. M. Rilke, *Sonety do Orfeusza*, part II, Sonet X, in: R. M. Rilke, *Wybór poezji*, transl. M. Jastrun, Kraków 1987, p. 281.



My Province

While skiing towards Mt. Kasprowy and slowly climbing a slope I could not resist the impression that this was quite a different mountain than the one I knew a quarter of a century ago. The configuration of the terrain had not altered and the tricks performed by the skiers are not radically different, but the novelty is striking. Not so long ago, a mere twenty or so years ago, Mt. Kasprowy was the domain of a distinctly delineated relation between the metropolis and the province. This small area witnessed the coexistence of all Polish skiers and it was immediately obvious who came from the centre of the country and who from the more distant regions. Obviously, there existed a single common denominator and a skiers' world. Within its range the less numerous members of the elite remained closer to the realisation of a certain evident model (skiing style, fashionable clothes, Western equipment, amount of time spent on the Mountain), while the masses standing in queues could only dream and hope that one day they too would join the "Duchy of Warsaw" (this being the name given to the skiers' metropolis). Despite all the differences and every so often fierce animosity there existed a certain discernible community, and the centre and the peripheries remained an important structural element of its existence. Today, no one speaks of the "Duchy of Warsaw" because it is simply impossible to notice any sort of a "capital" on Mt. Kasprowy. There are also no elements making it possible to situate the skier upon a certain scale. Skis, clothes, shoes mean so little. Their universality and availability have deprived them of some of the symbolic significance; in addition, skiing itself now possesses a radically different dimension. The equipment of a serious skier creates a radical chasm from that of the amateur. The two no longer meet while assessing the style of their performance, nor do they share conversations about the quality of the snow. They simply come from dissimilar worlds and the Mountain too differs and no longer creates a bond. Relations are weak or outright absent. The multiplicity of the proposals defined by the snow and skis is the reason why the opposition: model-like/emulated, strong/weak, metropolitan/provincial is replaced by: mine/not mine.

Choice and personal decision become fundamental since they grant a name. I would like to ski, I declare, and this access, together with its consequences, defines me much more than the sort of skier I shall become. It is not blind chance or an accident, but some sort of powerful and demonic determinants that locate me here and not elsewhere. I select and mould my world whenever I have the opportunity, will and energy, and enter a reality whose basic property becomes *mine-ness*. This is the case in the mountains. Is this an enclave, a special place with individual features or, on the contrary, do distinctive tendencies that in

horizontal and expansive worlds are less visible come to the fore in this small area?

In *Lapidaria*¹ by Ryszard Kapuściński, a spiritual diary of drifting across the world inspired by extraordinary intellectual and physical activity, a voracious need to see, experience, and comprehend the world, we deal with a grand panorama of our times. The author constantly contrasted the poverty of the South with the wealth of the North, the descent of the Third World, which he found emotionally close and which is a concept encompassing more a civilisational quality than a political or geographic one, and the enclosure of the West, which to a considerable measure provoked it. The contrasts entail assorted qualities, but the opposition of interest to us, i.e. between the metropolis and the province, is missing.

The world at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century appears not to have a distinct centre. On the contrary, Kapuściński constantly stressed a tendency towards separation and distinction, a striving towards autonomy, and, in a word, a provincialisation of reality.

Professor Piotr Sztompka about the world congress of sociology in Montreal in 1998. The Congress dealt primarily with the processes of globalisation (...). The other aspect of globalisation is a defensive manifestation of own distinctness (...). Globalism - a feature of the contemporary World - is the fragility of dominant confrontations, orders and unions. "Today" might look totally different than "yesterday" and no one is any longer surprised that suddenly things are different, no one asks about the causes or seeks the roots. (...)

Pessimists claim that the future of our planet will involve further Balkanisation and even tribalisation. They declare that in a certain sense we are returning to the most distant times, to our very beginnings, when Earth was populated by an enormous gathering of innumerable groups, clans and ethnic communities without any clear-cut central structures and hierarchies. This Balkanisation and tribalisation are not only territorial but also mental. A narrow, closed and one-directional mentality is on the rise,

one that rejects everything that is different and that does not confirm its convictions about its exceptionality, superiority and supremacy (...). Provincialism denotes enclosure within one's narrow world in which the local mediocre attain the dimension of powerful heroes and petty incidents achieve the rank of historical events (...). The weakness of provincialism lies in the fact that it often becomes a shelter for the frustrated, the failures, those devoured by ambition and devoid of talent.²

This portrait of contemporaneity outlined by Kapuściński is confirmed also by other prominent interpreters. A close image is depicted by, i.a. Bauman in *Liquid Modernity*.³ In other words, we are dealing not with a subjective vision but with a solidly grounded opinion. In addition, it harmonises with the fact that the Internet – a web, the emblem of our times, universally known and obvious, also emphasizes the changeability, undulation, horizontality, and absence of hierarchy, as well as the fetters, the whole, the impossibility of evasion.

How is it possible in a world thus perceived, devoid of obvious centres whose number is so great that they mutually annul their magnetism and where metropolises perish due to their peripheries, to speak about the province and its spiritual offspring - provincialism? No problem would arise if we were to assume that the phenomenon of the metropolis and the centre is created by quantity. On the other hand, however, it is easy to indicate examples toppling such a thesis. Political or financial power and the force of culture, science, and art are often located beyond the most populous largest cities. Small Geneva is higher ranking in the financial world than gigantic Mexico City, while Washington is politically more important than New York. Moslems regard Mecca as much more significant than Cairo or Karachi. We may speak about the phenomenon of interest to us only when there come into being new models of existence, lifestyles possessing sufficient power and energy to conquer both further and nearer regions. Assorted factors may stimulate the force of radiation. Nonetheless, the latter is evident. The generated model is legible and distinctive; hence the force of its attraction. Kapuściński never indicated any point endowed with such properties on the map of the contemporary world. He also consistently did not speak about the province as a physically existing space but often returned to provincialism, which he conceived as a state of the spirit and a manner of thought, and which he deemed as the worst threat for human existence. He inhabited some sort of a spiritual metropolis that he did not present outright. One thing, however, is clear. It is not located anywhere in the concrete world but remains a transcendent point making it possible to attain a distance – naturally, varied – towards all sorts of reality. This citizen of the world, a martyr of the journey, whose path links New York salons with African

refugee camps, Parisian hotels with collapsing Russian rural dwellings, who talked with the great figures of our times, described the sources of his "worldliness":

The impact of my childhood upon later fascinations:

*Pińsk was situated along the peripheries of, once, Poland, and now, Europe. This is probably why I am constantly attracted by the peripheries of the world. The climate of the peripheries, the time that follows such a slow course there, the languid and drowsy atmosphere, those empty streets and immobile faces peering through small windows and raised curtains. I remember silent Bernardyńska Street and the unexpectedly appearing figure of a rabbi. He walks hurriedly and looks around nervously as if he suddenly became aware that he had mixed up worlds and has to quickly return to non-being.*⁴ Paradoxically, Kapuściński's openness, curiosity, and attention came into being in a godforsaken locality amidst marshes and bogs, but were able to truly originate, develop, and produce effects only when severed from the roots and after abandoning the place of origin.

In his essay - significantly entitled: *Paradoks prowincji*⁵ - Dariusz Czaja indicated the archetypal dimension of such a situation: Fellini's Rimini, Kantor's Wielopole, Mrozek's Kraków - the worlds of beginnings, small, poor, part of the past, never to return. One either left them or outright escaped from them, and at times the horror of history drove one out. It is impossible, however, to abandon them totally. They are constant, albeit as reminiscence, nostalgia or longing. For the authors - an important source of their works, and for those who use only their life to write a text - a lesson taught by memory, an important stirring of the soul. D. Czaja described this movingly: *According to this interpretation, the inhabitant of the province is simply a different name of the human condition of each one of us regardless of the place of residence. (...) The present-day Everyman is a figure with an underpinning of longing, whose characteristic mark is a part of the DNA cultural chain distinguishing each one of us.*⁶

Lithuania, my fatherland! You are like health/ How much you must be valued, will only discover/ The one who has lost you.

At the onset of the twenty first century, when liquidity, change, and impermanence are a global experience, and in the wake of the previous century, an era of disinheritance, banishment and loss, Mickiewicz's words resound with a dramatic force containing a strikingly true image capturing human plight. A portrayal of the Poles from the Eastern Borderlands, the Germans of Prussia, the Serbs of Kosovo, the Hindi of London, refugees from China and Indochina living in American cities, the inhabitants of refugee camps in Africa and on other continents. Much divides them, but they share only/as much as "lost fate, whose value grows as it becomes more distant in time and space. The harmony and beauty of a reality given without

our choice, and in this sense natural, becomes obvious only from a perspective, and as a finite experience it results in longing and calls for reflection and deliberation. A thus conceived province would be, therefore, the name of a spiritual land enduring *via* literature, the cinema, music, and the visual arts. As a rule, in its capacity as the memory of the poor it would become a vanishing continent implicitly departing together with them.

If we describe the province in this fashion then what will its opposite be like?

Is the *here and now* in which we exist a centre or a metropolis? In what manner is it accessible considering that we lack in it distance necessary for cognition?

After all, we remain inside a reality that is only becoming and starting to take place. It is open and focused on the future, and thus unclaimed. We experience it more than understand it, or rather it is our existence within it that constitutes its comprehension. In this case, our understanding does not consist of examination and interpretation (as in the case of the province) but of selection and activity. It involves writing much more than reading reality. At the end of his journey Kapuściński said something very characteristic in one of the interviews: *I do not understand the world*. Despite this, or rather precisely for this reason, he fervently described his special experiences while creating the world.

In his: *I do not understand* the great reporter evoked a peculiar feature of the centre, the space of life. In extraordinary essays about the reflections of Friedrich Nietzsche, Krzysztof Michalski also presented this quality: *Always, regardless of the extent to which we determine how much we shall know about it, "my" life, "our" life are something more than just I or we. Consequently, it possesses an inalienable, different, dark, and strange side, about which all knowledge fails, a side about which we cannot know. Note that the word "dark" assumes in this context additional meaning. Here, "darkness" does not denote a mere lack of knowledge. It is excess rather than absence, excess that is life, an excess of meaning beyond everything that we know and can know. A darkness of life seen from the point of view of each particular moment, a darkness about which we can say that it is unfathomably deep, mysterious, and too full of meaning. (...) In other words, by describing life as the will of power Nietzsche maintained that life does not adapt itself to the world but shapes it (...). Life understood as power and the will of power is a life that cannot be restricted either to that, which it is or something that it could or should be. In that sense, it is "excess"*.

(...). *Life is creative. It is the power of the will because it always exceeds itself by creating constantly new forms, of which none can become its ultimate form.*⁷

If we, therefore, see the province as a painted image, a completed text, the space of memory, that what

is closed, distant, and recollected and for which one longs, then the centre appears to be life, the will of power so evocatively depicted by Michalski. Note that the most conventional manners of presenting the opposition of interest to us aim in a similar direction. Boring, suffocating, ever the same, ossified, dark, stifling, hopeless – are those not the names given to the province? Even when we describe it as calm, gentle, laid back, a vacation destination, and locate it on the site of death/birth, it remains distant from the force of existence. He who wishes to exist better, to live and not to vegetate, sets off for the symbolic city. It is the latter that bustles, roars, glimmers, and constitutes multiplicity, intensity, and fever. Kapuściński declared that great cities attract thanks to their opportunity, potential, and reinforced life that reveals quantity.

The metropolis and the province are thus more the figures of an existential situation than a description of material reality. This is the reason why there is nothing strange in the fact that the same place will be evaluated differently. We are dealing with a black hole in which everything gets lost, while for others it is a territory full of life. Accounts by Andrzej Stasiuk from the European end of the world show just how radical this reversal can be or even something more: contrary to initial observations we are not tackling a strong opposition.

Here, life is not contrasted with death or existence with non-being. It rather faces that, which is taking place, coming into being, which creates, encloses, grants shape and form and renders comprehensible. This is life harmonized with knowledge, the obvious, and the impossible novelty reducing it. *But we must repeat: KNOWING and BEING - wrote D. H. Lawrence - are opposite, antagonistic states. The more you know, exactly, the less you are. The more you are, in being, the less you know [...]. This is the great cross of man, his dualism. The blood-self, and the nerve-brain self.*⁸ Succumbing to the province is a natural process of the life, which one wants to see and understand.

The price of such a task will be cooling off, slowing down, enclosure, the loss of the principal quality of the metropolis, i.e. power, excess, the dark side. Why pay such a price, what is the purpose of knowledge, the province, memory? Why did the "blonde beast" establish a "dead class"? Tadeusz Kantor, whose reflections about the province Zbigniew Benedyktowicz extracted and recalled in *Powrót do domu*,⁹ said: *Probably only there can we be redeemed*,¹⁰ adding: *We stand in the door helpless, saying farewell to our childhood, upon the threshold of eternity and death, in this poor and gloomy interior; beyond those doors storms and human hell rage and tidal waves rise.*¹¹ Against what does that childishly helpless and poor space protect us, towards what sort of eternity does it lead us – this is the theme presented in Kantor's spectacles through image, sound, mood,

the avoidance of words, declarations, and unambiguity. Figures of the inferno, the flood and the storm indicate that for this immensely dramatic person existence is threatened with annihilation, dissolution, scattering, i.e. the loss of steady points, obvious places of reference.

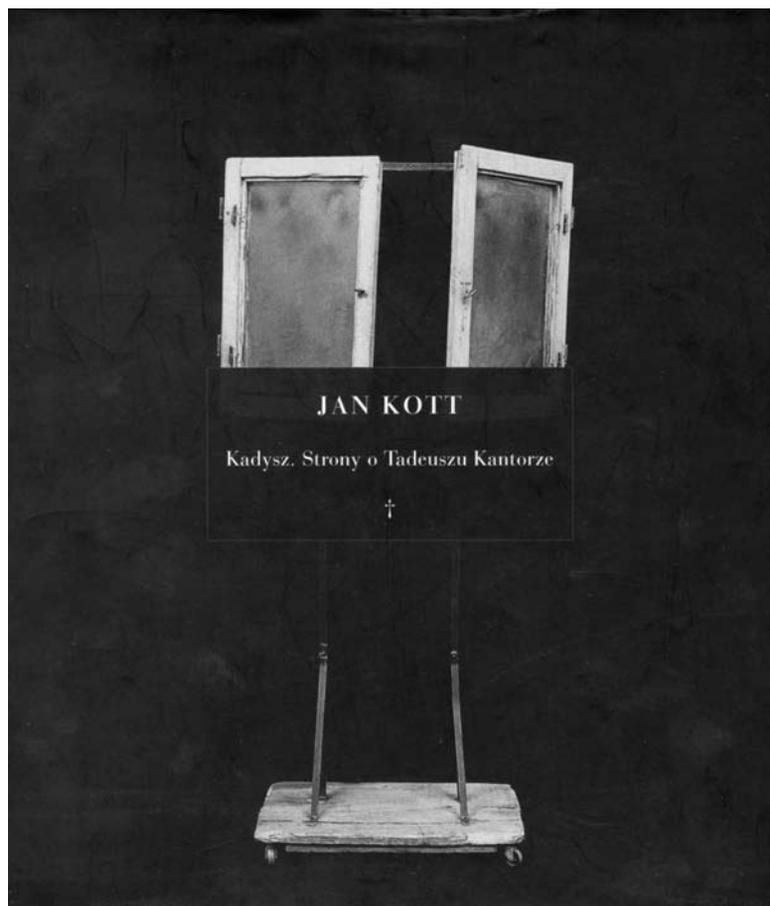
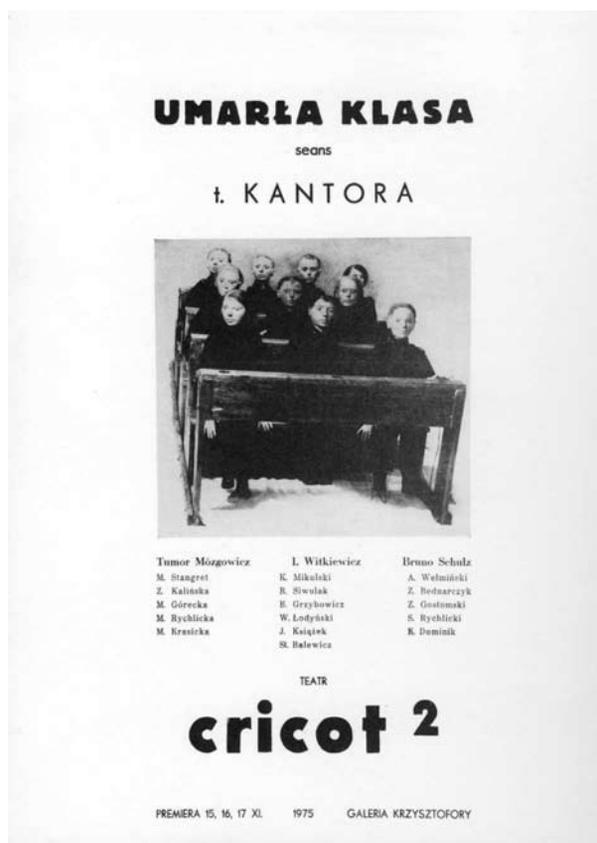
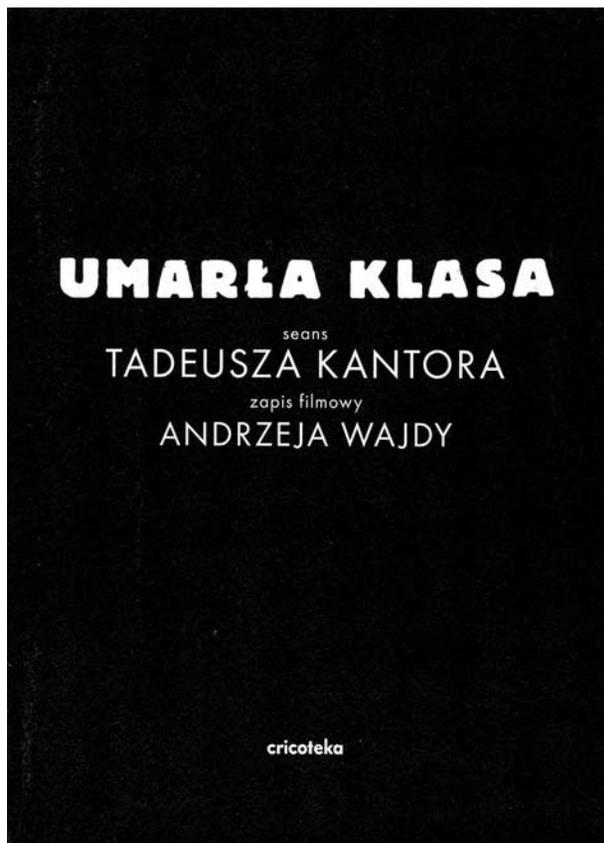
Osip Mandelstam, yet another great witness of the twentieth century, wrote during an apogee of Stalinist terror: *We are living, but can't feel the land where we stay*, and this phrase conceals the horror of a total lack of enrootment and the absence of all anchors. *We are living* meant at the time: we are driven, exiled, marched, treated as a herd at the disposal of others. All *mine-ness* is destroyed and denigrated, and sole truth lies in the created project of the future, while the present is considered only if it serves the former. Nothing opposes a thus devised, constructed life created by people and dependent on them more than the province. Childhood and old age, birth and death, the extremities of life remembered and recalled, all possess certain independence. Given without a choice, obvious, and impossible to negate, close to the borderline of all human power, they refer to, or perhaps only indicate or suggest a dimension greater than life and transcendent in relation to it. Reference to it denotes seeing the poverty of each finite existence and comprehending the relativity and, in this sense, the weakness of each project. More, in this perspective there is no other but provincial life. The metropolis is only a movement, a blinding flash, an escape from the memory of prime and ultimate things. Hope, faith or, worst of all, certainty that such a moment will last puts an end to all thinking and dims the imagination. After all, the project of condensing volatility, the enslavement of power is one of the central ideas of the metropolis. The power of its existence is not to transfix the end, which discloses frailty. It would be an expression of pride and narcissism to grant the idea, frequently merging in the metropolis, the name of provincial thinking, but it would also indicate its universality and extensive distribution rather than scattered intensity.

While pondering the opposition of interest to us we continue the laborious task of delineating the obvious border between its members. The metropolis and the province, death and life, the intense and the weak, the dark and the comprehensible, the open and the closed, the existent and the recalled, all those categories introduce order into reality, create order that makes comprehension possible, but also conceal more – they lose an existence that cannot be uttered through them. The continuum, the transition, the encapsulation, the difference of the same, the horror of the metropolis-province – this is the misery of ethnographic thinking adhering to life and experiencing reality. A magnificent weakness.

When after the last steep ascent I finally reach Świńska Pass and look at Goryczkowy Cirque, ever the same and yet totally different due to past ski expeditions, experienced years, and the events I witnessed in this calm place, where, fortunately, I am now all alone, I know that I am in my provincial-metropolitan world. I hear once again the words of Claudio Magris, an Italian from Trieste, said about Ryszard Kapuściński and indirectly, in my opinion, about the issue examined by us: *Kapuściński knows that it is necessary to carefully listen to the voice that is within us without obscuring it with words. I find in him a sense of life that is also fundamental for me: loyalty to wanderings with people whom we love, be they living or dead but ever present. And loyalty to things, places, seasons of the year. This writer, so fascinated with reality and its limits, sometimes succumbs to a desire for whiteness, emptiness, a void, a poor cell – the most discreet signs of all things. Silence - as if there was too much clamour, too many events and objects, too many oppositions. I too always thought that someone who really loves life without artificial comfort and its bathos sometimes becomes really tired of it all.*¹²

Endnotes

- ¹ R. Kapuściński, *Lapidaria I-III*, Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej, Warszawa 2008.
- ² R. Kapuściński, *Lapidaria IV-VI*, Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej, Warszawa 2008.
- ³ Z. Bauman, *Płynna rzeczywistość*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2007.
- ⁴ R. Kapuściński, *Lapidaria IV-VI*, op. cit., p. 35, 36, 43.
- ⁵ D. Czaja, *Paradoks prowincji*, "Konteksty" 2/2008, pp. 14-27.
- ⁶ D. Czaja, op. cit., p. 33.
- ⁷ K. Michalski, *Plomień wieczności*, Znak, Kraków 2007, pp. 232, 241.
- ⁸ K. Michalski, op. cit., p. 246.
- ⁹ Z. Benedyktowicz, *Powrót do domu. Tarkowski i Kantor*, "Konteksty" 2/2008, see here english version previous pages.
- ¹⁰ Z. Benedyktowicz, op. cit., p. 24.
- ¹¹ Z. Benedyktowicz, op. cit., p. 25.
- ¹² C. Magris, *Wierność wędrówce*, in: Kapuściński R., *Wierszebrane*, Biblioteka Gazety Wyborczej, Warszawa 2008, pp. 133-134



At the top: DVD cover and poster to *Umarła Klasa* (Dead Class) by Tadeusz Kantor

Publisher: Ośrodek Dokumentacji Sztuki Tadeusza Kantora Cricoteka
Janusz Palikot
Studio Filmowe Propaganda
Kraków 2007

On the left: cover of the book: Jan Kott, *Kadysz. Strony o Tadeuszu Kantorze*, Biblioteka Mnemosyne, ed. Piotr Kłoczowski, wyd. słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2007

Graphic and typing layout Janusz Górski
On the cover: window from *Wielopole*, *Wielopole*

Photo: Marcin Czechowicz © by Pracownia

ZBIGNIEW
BENEDYKTOWICZ

A Phantom of the Centre of the World. A Contribution to the Anthropology of Contemporaneity

*From the corner of Raclawicka and Miłobędzka
streets
(I live nearby)
Every day, if I'm up to it,
I look at the Palace of Culture...*

*Its architecture is unimportant
It is the architecture of my imagination that is signifi-
cant
The architecture of my of blood and heart
Life and death
Sun and mist. (...)*

(Eugeniusz Żytomirski, *Pałac Kultury*,
in: *Liryczne okienko Stolicy*, "Stolica",
15 May 1963)

*In the perspective of a moment the past day is seen dif-
ferently than the past millennia.*

(Stanisław Cichowicz, *Skąd ten kanon?*,
Polska Sztuka Ludowa, no. 1, 1990)

Much has been written about the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science.¹ Hundreds of reportages and articles. It has been the topic of poems and songs, poetry and prose. Its image became a permanent part of contemporary literature and has intrigued and inspired the cinema.² It appeared in youth subculture, in fanzines, special-occasion texts of rock bands, and Rastafarian texts, and is discernible as a motif of graffiti on the walls of Warsaw houses.³ It has been discussed by journalists, publicists, men of science, architects, and historians, historians of architecture and art, and men of letters.

The Palace of Culture has been the theme of writings by Hanna Krall, Stefan Kisielewski, Leopold Tyrmand, Jerzy Kosiński, and its foremost bard - Tadeusz Konwicki.

A thorough survey must (perhaps without undue astonishment) lead us to the declaration that the Palace of Culture belongs to the quite possibly non-cohesive, scattered, and at times concealed or (shame-

fully?) hidden collective imagination of the past decades, and that it is a prominent part of the latter. On the other hand, the Palace has not been discussed by ethnographers. The reasons for embarking upon this topic and the motives, which inspired me, are much more numerous and I shall thus mention only several most essential ones.

Start from the least important. This article was to appear in a monographic issue of "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" about the symbolism of the centre. In reference to this category, described by Eliade, the issue in question was to embrace reflections concerning the symbolic of the home conceived as mythical space, the mythology of the place in a sequence characteristic for the symbolic of the centre: home - village - town; these deliberations pertain to the small (local) homeland, the mythology of the town. A sketch on the Palace of Culture was to be published next to an article evoking images of the homeland in reminiscences by Wieniawa-Długoszowski, the poems of émigré poets, and images of the "small homeland" recorded in folk poetry; alongside images-plans by Surowiak; next to reflections on the world of allotments, and, finally, combined with an essay by Ludwik Stomma on the significance of the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower – the mythical sites of Paris. According to the principle of the counterpoint these assorted reflections on the symbolic and mythical structures of the home were to be accompanied by yet another contemporary symptom, another variant and *sui-generis* extension of the symbolic of the centre. This concept was complemented by discernibly lively interest in the category of the home upon the basis of reflections about culture, expressed by parallel research into the conception of the home conducted by sociologists and sociologists of culture,⁴ or the extraordinary success of Witold Rybczyński's *Home. A Short History of an Idea*,⁵ a best-seller on the American, Canadian and English-speaking market. This Canadian architect of Polish descent devoted special attention in his study about the Home and a brief history of the idea of the Home to such concepts as: "intimacy", "privacy" and "domesticity" by following their historical moulding up to this very day. With images of homes in contemporary film as well as those launched by fashion, advertisements, photography, and magazines on interior design as his point of departure Rybczyński recorded the phenomenon present in particular phases of fashion in recent years, i.e. a special nostalgia and longing for the past, and the complementary phenomenon of discovered (devised) "tradition" created for the sake of contemporaneity; in doing so, he descended more and more into the past. For all practical purposes, the book is a publication not so much from the range of the history of architecture, as the title and the name of the author could suggest, but from the domain of the history of

culture, written with extensive anthropological impetus. The transformations and moulding of the conceits of “domesticity”, “intimacy” and “privacy” are discussed in reference to the language, culture, mentality and changes occurring therein during particular eras, times and places. The book is dominated by the principle to which the author referred in the introduction and which is contained in a maxim by Milan Kundera, namely, that the task of the writer and writing does not consist of proclaiming the truth but its discovery. The force of the publication in question is also determined by the fact that the reflections amassed therein were inspired by the author’s personal experiences and were closely intertwined with the extraordinary adventure of building and shaping his home.⁶ Despite this extensive anthropological perception and frequent reference to examples borrowed from assorted distant and frequently exotic cultural situations, the characteristic feature of Rybczyński’s book, concentrated mainly on American, Anglo-Saxon culture, is a distinctively Occidentalistic attitude. This holds true predominantly for experiences recorded either in the history of West European culture or those belonging to contemporaneity. We are dealing with a brief history of the idea of the home written from the Western point of view.

In other words, the planned monographic “home” issue of “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” could, together with a text about the Palace of Culture, become a contribution from this part of the world together with its rather different complications, from this part of the “other Europe”, a contribution to the theme of the home appearing and discussed in present-day humanities and stirring the interest of the most varied milieus. This original conception, however, was partly thwarted and the issue was split into several fascicles. Nonetheless, the problem remained.

For many years, ethnography and anthropology of culture wrote about the “disappearance of the traditional object” of those domains. This trend was recently mentioned most conspicuously by Clifford Geertz in his essay: *Be There, Write Here: The world, examined chiefly by anthropologists and once known as primeval, tribal, traditional or folk, and today emergent, undergoing modernisation, peripheral or still concealed, has changed immensely as has the world of the scientific institutions from which these researchers originate.*⁷ A similar course was followed by James Clifford, whose reflections concentrate on the problematic nature of the description of culture shown against the backdrop of relations between twentieth-century ethnography, art, and, literature (*The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*).⁸ Observing the changes to which ethnography was, and continues to be subjected, Clifford placed greatest emphasis on the one that occurred in experiencing the journey and residing, the change and shift of the meaning and

sense of such concepts as: “centre” (“Metropolis”) and “Peripheries”. If the task of ethnography is to search for a way of understanding and approaching a different world, which since the sixteenth century has been unified in cartography, and one of the fundamental functions of ethnography is “orientation” (a term dating back to the time when Europe travelled and was engaged in self-discovery in relation to the fantastically unified “East”) then it could be said about twentieth-century ethnography involved in reflecting “new spatial praxis”, new forms of residence and circulation, that it is accompanied by a *sui generis* experience of “disorientation”. When we take a look at our century through the prism of a drastic expansion of mobility - including tourism, economic migration, immigration, throngs of polyglot refugees, emigrants, and asylum seekers, when we take into account urban scattering and the blending of foreign populations in towns on six continents, and, finally, the very fact that “habitation” takes place with the assistance of mass-scale transport, automobiles, and airplanes - then all this is the reason why in the contemporary world the two experiences of “habitation” and “travelling” are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish. Apparently, there is no such a distant place on the planet where the presence of modern products, the mass media and their power would not be palpable. Old topography is exhausted, Clifford concluded.⁹ No one any more (and the ethnographer in particular) leaves home in the hope that he will discover something radically different, new, or strange. The feeling of nativeness can be discovered at the ends of the world. At the same time, differences, cultural distinctness, alienness, and foreignness are becoming part of the closest environment. The anticipation of authenticity in culture and art is doubted. The old topography is exhausted, wrote James Clifford. *Why go to the Trobriands?*¹⁰ - Polish sociologists seem to be echoing him - when one can come across the closed world of consciousness isolation in a contemporary village some 200 kms from Warsaw. Within this context the Palace of Culture and Science could appear to be an extremely attractive and intriguing object for an ethnographer. In its capacity as an example of *sui generis* (domesticated (?)) exotica within the range of our outstretched hand it poses assorted questions, tempts, and outright challenges to embark upon an attempted description and to take the risk of interpretation. It seems odd that ethnographers, sensitive to the strangeness of the surrounding world and cultural phenomena, and accentuating the importance of astonishment in cognitive experience inscribed into anthropology have so far paid insufficient attention to it, and that simply nothing has been written about it. Meanwhile, the Palace of Culture makes it possible to transgress this traditional situation and condition of the ethnographer,

not very clearly outlined in the contemporary world (*be there and write here*) and makes it possible "to be here and write here" and thus to realise the essence of the task of present-day anthropology as understood by Geertz. While attempting to locate this text within its current, and speaking about the anthropology of contemporaneity I accept its comprehension by following the example of the American anthropologist: *The risks are worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of our understanding of what it is to open (a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another [...]. What it is (a task at which no one ever does more than not utterly fail) is to inscribe a present – to convey in words "what it is like" to be somewhere specific in the lifeline of the world: Here, as Pascal famously said, rather than There; Now rather than Then. Whatever else ethnography might be – Malinowskian experience seeking, Levis-Straussian rage for order, Benedictine cultural irony, or Evans-Pritchardish cultural reassurance – it is above all a rendering of the actual, a vitality phrased.*¹¹

I would be not quite honest if I were to insist that ethnographers had never written about the Palace of Culture and Science, appearing in a polemical form in: *Przyczynek do powinności przemysłów perypatetycznych*¹² by Jacek Ołędzki. Recall the essence of the dispute: the heart of the matter was hopscotch, or, more precisely, an interpretation of this game, full of question marks and referring to its archaic ritual-belief motif of "wandering to the netherworld" discussed by Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski in: *Podróże do piekiel. Rzecz o szamańskich misteriach* (Warszawa 1979).

Not to be groundless, let us cite a hazardous, but tempting owing to the symbolic of a journey to the netherworld, example of hopscotch. Is jumping between "hell" and "heaven" not the echo of some sort of ritual journey to those regions? Note, that jumping on one leg (similarly to limping) is associated universally with the demonic, with the spheres of the subterranean. Does the schematic figure of the "person" drawn in chalk not resemble a shaman's drum, shaped like a human figure with a monstrous head, or an anthropomorphic cosmic tree painted on its surface?

Rejecting this interpretation Ołędzki declared: *In this manner we might explain everything, including the first skyscrapers together with the most recent ones, more than 400 meters tall. After all, these are simply non-anthropomorphic cosmic trees, "axes linking the bottom and the top" (or trees of life, a term obsessively applied by many researchers). I cannot tell whether the Palace of Culture and Science may be regarded as a cosmic tree but it was certainly the first highest building in Poland (today this rank is held by the Warszawa Hotel). Not without reason was its called "Prudential".*¹³ By resorting to irony and derision Ołędzki urged us to resort to Prudence (after all, the first Warsaw skyscraper belonging to an Insurance Society was known as "Prudential"). Rejecting this in-

terpretation and its archaic religious-ritual foundation Ołędzki proposed his own common sense presentation of hopscotch. Employing peripatetic detailed analysis he tried (despite serious gaps in the documentation – once again, ethnographers had failed) to insert hopscotch into history, connecting it with the idea of universal education developing across the world from the second half of the nineteenth century, the production of flagstones, the urban environment, and closely with a certain old fashioned model of elementary schooling. Hopscotch is to contain *the idea of labour and the outright onerous passage from grade to grade, from the most difficult or worst remembered first grade - HELL, to the last – HEAVEN*. Without delving further into the details of this unilinear, historical interpretation, and without becoming involved in a dispute about it, because this is not the occasion, let us return to the Palace of Culture and Science. I cannot tell whether the proposed sketch will be capable of helping Jacek Ołędzki and other researchers in solving doubts (if they were to experience them), getting rid of uncertainties and discovering a response to the question: *Should the Palace of Culture be included amongst cosmic trees?* (In my opinion, it will prove to be of little use since these are not the intentions of this study, nor is it possible, seeing that uncertainty and doubts, as the gathered material will show, are part of the allure of the Palace and one of its constitutive features). Nonetheless, as regards the Palace I would be inclined, in contrast to Ołędzki's proposal, to choose the part of interpretation he rejected. In order to do so, I seek the support of the earlier-cited Geertz: *Ex ante prescriptive criticism – this is what you must do, this is what you must not – is as absurd in anthropology as it is in any other intellectual enterprise not dogmatically based.*¹⁴ I shall, therefore, select the first of the two manners of interpretation: the "farsighted" one, whose horizon consists of the archaic-religious-ritual (Wasilewski), and the "short-sighted" historical-genetic one, peripatetically interested in the details of daily life, our closest contemporaneity (Ołędzki) ... I was prepared to write: I choose the former, which I find closest. But is any sort of a choice actually necessary? In the case of the Palace of Culture we are in the opportune situation of not being forced to investigate or present its historical origin (i.e. Joseph Vissarinowicz Stalin), and have at our disposal extensive and varied documentation spanning from the emergence of the idea of building the Palace in Warsaw, the erection of the first foundations, and the particular phases of its growth and expansion all the way to the present day. In the case of the Palace of Culture both approaches could exist as parallel without one excluding the other (i.e. in our conventional division: the second excluding the first). The Palace of Culture offers us the wonderful opportunity of being longsighted and myopic at the same

time. That this is a division far from perfect is demonstrated by the earlier cited example of hopscotch. At the end of his article Olędzki reconstructed meticulously a scenario of the “ritual-theatre” accompanying hopscotch and returned to the “rashly” criticised thesis proposed by Wasilewski about the existence of an archaic hinterland of this children’s game. More, both interpretations, the one closing Olędzki’s article and the one suggested by him at the beginning of his text, do not undermine the course followed by Wasilewski. The “laborious and onerous transition from class to class” and “the mood of intensifying the awareness of the difficulty and demonization of the task” present in the game remain within the aura of the initiation rite; it was to its background and archaic foundation that Wasilewski made references. To make things clear: the difference between those two approaches consists of the fact that the interpretation proposed by Wasilewski is “understanding” and, in my opinion, did not harbour the ambition of “explaining” in the way in which Olędzki comprehended it, while its historical-genetic interpretation could be described precisely as “explanatory”.¹⁵

I must admit that in ethnology and ethnography I had been always attracted and enchanted not only by a predilection for the concrete (presented in a masterly manner in texts by Jacek Olędzki), but also by the fact that sometimes distant cultural phenomena are considered not in isolation, and that for the sake of their more complete comprehension (without obliterating differences and specific contours) they are contrasted on a more universal scale, where (as in the case of Wasilewski) archaic shamanic ritual scenarios of “wandering to the netherworld”, the initiation ritual, and the contemporary game of hopscotch involving hell and heaven can exist side by side, encompassed within a single glance.

Just like the Lascaux cave paintings can be examined within their palaeolithic temporal and cultural horizon, and the work executed by a contemporary artist on Big Salt Lake in Utah can be viewed separately, so it is possible to perceive them jointly. In our periodical this was the theme of reflections by Stanisław Cichowicz, which can be referred also to other cultural phenomena, both the children’s game of hopscotch drawn in chalk on a sidewalk and the example of the Palace of Culture, of interest to us: *Art has its expanse, which establishes the artist’s gesture from and for him, it has its temporality ruled by the mystery of the existence of mankind. In him and in it one must contrast artistic documents left on the walls of European caves by the Palaeolithic culture and on the dry bed of an American lake by contemporary culture; this double scale, especially the temporal one, contains a proximity incomprehensible for man; true, eyewitness familiarity with history is alive but historical retrospection erects a memory carrier: from the*

*viewpoint of a moment one sees rather yesterday than past millennia.*¹⁶

I am well aware of the fact that there are numerous possible interpretations of the Palace of Culture – architectural, historical (historiosophic), ideological-political, reference to the world of the language and phenomena of propaganda, and many others. I, however, am most interested in the Palace of Culture envisaged as an unusual “strong” reality, by no means part of daily life, a reality “existing *par excellence*”, or, to cite M. Eliade – sacral reality, an element of the contemporary secular *sacrum*. We face a question similar to the one Claude-Henri Rocquet asked Eliade about the Lenin mausoleum - is it a sacral object? ¹⁷ To what extent can the *profanum* turn into the *sacrum*? We are concerned also with recognition of the expression and structures of the *sacrum* in a world, which presents itself decidedly as *profanum*. I am interested in the Palace of Culture as an element of symbolic imagination, a structure of long-term duration. This is the reason why I wish to examine the Palace in reference to the complex and symbolic cycles of the “centre”, the symbolic of the centre of the Earth ¹⁸, with such images belonging to it as: “holy mountain”, “cosmic mountain”, *axis mundi* and parallel visions of *columna universalis*, “a pillar of the world upholding almost everything that is”, a column of the heavens, a pillar, a ladder, a “stairway to heaven”, a tree, “the tree of the world” and “the tree of life”. I intend to search for those images characteristic for archaic conceptions and systems of religious imagery in contemporary testimonies about the Palace of Culture, making it possible to perceive a community (and difference) in the experiencing of space and place by contemporary man and a member of primeval societies. This is the experience described by Eliade: (...) *The religious man sought to live as near as possible to the Center of the World. He knew that his country constituted the navel of the universe, and, above all, that the temple or the palace were veritably Centers of the World.*¹⁹

I shall be the interested in the Palace of Culture as reality brimming with meanings and amassing assorted, frequently contrary emotions. In a word: a contemporary myth of the Palace of Culture and the Palace as a myth. A symbol that concentrates both contents referring to the archaic symbolic of the world and stressing - here I slightly precede the analysis – its phantom-like, unreal character. Speaking about the Palace of Culture as a symbol and about the symbol, its polyphonic and polysemantic nature, ²⁰ I refer directly to the comprehension of the symbol mentioned by Yuri Lotman,²¹ accentuating its “unclear”, “allusive” character: *The content only flickers through the expression and the latter only indicates the content by means of allusion.* The example of the Palace of Culture makes it possible to follow all the essential features of the

symbol as a condensator of cultural memory, also described by Lotman:

1. *The symbol always features something archaic. Each culture requires strata of texts realising the function of the archaic.*

2. *Symbols preserved the ability to store exceptionally copious and important texts in a rolled-up form.*

3. *The symbol never belongs to a single synchronic cross section of culture – it always cuts across this cross section vertically, coming from the past and departing into the future. The memory of the symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolical textual surrounding.*

4. *As an important mechanism of the memory of culture symbols transfer texts, schemes and other semiotic products from one stratum of culture to another.*

5. *The symbol occurs as irregular in relation to the surrounding textual space as a messenger of other cultural epochs (= other cultures), as a reminder about the ancient (= "eternal") foundations of culture. On the other hand, the symbol actively correlates with the cultural context, transforms itself under its impact and itself transforms it.*

6. *An element most essential in the case of our "text-expression", i.e. the Palace of Culture, is indefiniteness in the relation between text-expression and text-content. The latter always belongs to a more multi-dimensional space of significance. This is why the expression does not fully coincide with the content, but only as if alludes to it. In a given case it is irrelevant whether the expression is merely a brief mnemonic sign of the diluted text-content or whether the former belongs to a secular, open and demonstrated sphere of culture, while the latter – to sacral, esoteric and mysterious culture (...).*

The sources on which I am basing my analysis call for a brief commentary and are of various quality and origin. In this case, I made use of press notes from "Trybuna Luda", "Express Wieczorny", "Życie Warszawy", and "Stolica", and to a lesser extent of weeklies and dailies issued outside Warsaw. I also benefited from the Palace Chronicle and supplementary material,²² special-occasion poetry, literary works, diaries, and recollections. In press accounts one is immediately struck by ceremonial, "uplifting", festivity stylistics as well as the fact that information is offered in certain language or propaganda schemes and clichés, copied and repeated outside the central press; this is the reason why first texts about the Palace of Culture create a specific set of canons. Already upon the level of the language used for writing about the Palace and the creation of its tradition we may observe *sui generis* sacralisation. Also upon the level of sources, the central problem of ethnographic description, which today, in the opinion of Geertz, faces anthropology and demands to be solved by the latter (*It is not quite clear just what "faction", imaginative writing about real people in real places at real times, exactly comes to beyond a clever coinage*²³), has found

itself outside our range and resolved without our greater participation.²⁴ Upon this occasion, we may note and warn the reader that in some of the cited texts the uplifting mood is accompanied by specific infantilisation, often the outcome of the pedagogical functions of a text intended for youngest readers (children, adolescents); this mixture of the lofty with the infantile is, however, also to be encountered in official texts addressed to adults. This is one of the most characteristic traits of the canon and ambiance of the period. In my analysis I try to maintain as much as possible a chronological sequence enabling better observation of the stratification of meanings and symbolic motifs. On the other hand, I cannot assure the reader that I shall be able to maintain suitable research distance and relegate my emotions. The Palace of Culture makes it feasible not only to descend to the archaic basis of symbolic and cultural memory. For a resident connected with this town since birth – and I am such a resident – and looking at the Palace since childhood this is also a journey to that part of one's personal past, which I do not encompass within living memory or awareness. Listen to the statements made by the witnesses of this world, already part of the past.

Flower of stone

We are introduced to the afore-mentioned unusual ambiance of the Palace, stressed in all texts, by a reporter's account. Here, we encounter other delineated motifs developed also in remaining evidence – elements of light (steel), splendour, brilliance, loftiness, and the Palace as a constant orientation point.

The author of this book is a reporter, i.e. the sort of person who jots down everything he notices and then passes on to others all that he takes down. In other words, to You. And you are members of a strange excursion who without leaving their homes in Stalinogród, Gdańsk, Szczecin or Łódź, assorted small towns and villagers shall tour the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw. This reporter has been observing the Palace for the past three years, from the day of its birth when the first streams of concrete flowed into its foundations (...).

It was 21 July, the eve of our national holiday, when members of the government of People's Poland stood on a ramp. The ceremonious moment began: Prime Minister Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz leaned across a barrier and threw a złoty piece while workers tore caps off their heads and throwing them high into the air cried out: "Na shchastie! For good luck!" (...). The steel colossus grew. Yes, steel, because today, when we admire the glowing floors, magnificent marbles, and fine upholstery we have to keep in mind that the Palace of Culture is predominantly made of steel. Each of the 32 storeys is steel, the dome of the Congress hall is steel, and the shaft of the colossal spire is steel. (...)

On that day people stopped in the streets and lifted their heads high: will they make it or not? The globe of the spire glistened brightly in the sunlight, covered with 1 4000 colourful pieces of glass.

From that day, regardless in which district of Warsaw we find ourselves - Wola, Bielany or Mokotów - we shall see the glowing spire of the Palace.

(Jerzy Janicki, O Pałacu Kultury i Nauki im. Józefa Stalina, TWP, Warszawa 1955).

Attention to the extraordinary nature of the Palace, and to the gift which it was intended to be for Warsaw, is drawn in another text. The Palace's unusual qualities could be summed up in the formula: "it existed before it came into being" and: "it was still not there and yet it already was". There also appears an oneiric motif: *We glance at newspapers from February, March, April – there it is! All the first pages feature enormous headlines: "A great gift from the Soviet Union to Warsaw", "The most magnificent building in Warsaw - the Palace of Culture and Science". Yes, it was 5 April 1952. A year ago no one even dreamed of a Friendship Palace. On the contrary, quite a few who read the papers on 6 April could have been thinking that he was dreaming. After all, History had not accustomed us to such gifts. This is particularly true of Warsaw. Our town had been plundered by all of Europe – the Swedes, the Saxons, Rakoczy of Transylvania and Catherine of St. Petersburg, the Austrian "invader" and the Napoleonic "ally". It was looted by generations of Prussian soldiers, from Friedrich to Hitler. History certainly did not acquaint us with such gifts as a Friendship Palace. And today? At present it is probably the only edifice in Warsaw that is still uncompleted but with which we are familiar and which we love and admire²⁵. Konstytucji Square achieved the feat of blending with Warsaw immediately after construction, but in this respect the Palace of Culture and Science outdid the MDM [Marszalkowska Residential District] by becoming an inseparable part of Warsaw already before it was erected. Are we not already familiar with a panorama of Warsaw, with the lower tower of the largest Palace by this time so much a part of Warsaw, soaring above the outline of Nowy Świat and Krakowskie Przedmieście streets, the Zygmunt Column and the dome of Staszica Palace, the solid of the Party House and the angular box of Prudential? (Karol Małcużyński, Nasza Stolica, "Trybuna Ludu", 17 January 1953).*

The extraordinary character of the enterprise, i.e. raising the Palace, was described by Alexander Zakharovich Antonov, constructor of Friendship Palace:

When I read the agreement signed by our governments about the gift for People's Poland I was overcome with pride for my country, government, and Stalin. Nowhere and never has anyone built something of the sort, with walls made of friendship. It is a great honour to participate in this magnificent deed (ibidem.)

A poem about the growth of the Palace of Culture also features a discernible epiphany of technology and includes a classical image of kratophany (*Mighty like a rock*). The Palace combines opposites and constitutes a specific *coincidentia oppositorum* captured in an oxymoron formula ("flower of stone"):

*On their way to Poland,
boards and bars,
lime and cement,
glass and machines.*

*Cars and cranes,
bronze and marble
to build a magnificent
Palace of Culture.*

*A long train
is already travelling to Poland
with powerful excavators
in the front.*

*On their way - resourceful
Soviet diggers,
drivers,
welders.*

*A hundred engineers,
masters, masons,
carpenters and fitters
have already arrived.*

*Work has
started in Warsaw.
They have boldly
embarked upon the deed.*

*Wheelbarrows are not needed
to transport soil:
the work of excavators
will make things easier.*

*These machines
are veritable dragons;
they instantly encompass
a wide range. (...)*

*Such work
renders all problems insignificant:
the earthworks
are already completed!*

*The foundations
are ready,
the great construction
has began!*

*Mighty walls
ascend higher:
the Palace of Culture
emerges from its foundations!*

*It boldly grows
and rapidly rises
like a flower of stone
on the flowerbed of the city!
Higher and higher
it expands.*

*A pleasure for the eyes!
A joy for the heart!
Look, soon
it will catch up with the clouds
this multi-storey
Palace of Culture!
Beautiful like a smile!
Mighty like a rock!
Tall like a tower!
Eternal like glory!
A magnificent monument
of Soviet glory:
a symbol of friendship
in the heart of Warsaw!*

(R. Piwarski, *Rośnie w Warszawie Pałac Kultury*)

Next to images stressing might, permanence, duration, images and symbols known in the history of religious ideas from the time of megalithic civilisations, which developed a complex lithic and religious valorisation of stones and rocks (The rock, the stone slab, the granite block prove to be eternally durable and resilient to damage and ultimately exist independently of becoming in time, cf. M. Eliade, *Historia wierzeń i idei religijnych*, Warszawa 1988, vol. 1, chapter V, p. 82 sq.), next to images of a tower (*tall like a tower*), among images of rising, growth, and entering the sky – here we once again perceive *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unification of the opposites: static and durability together with dynamic becoming, motion (*it will catch up with the clouds*), overcoming weight, the motif of flight (*it will reach the clouds/*

Where birds and clouds abound), in other words, amidst imagery from the symbolic *axis mundi*²⁶, there appears in descriptions of the Palace the image of the *M o u n t a i n*, also typical for the symbolism of the centre. Naturally, this is not a pure image of the “cosmic mountain” linking Earth and Heaven (although it is located in the centre: *Seen from afar in the very heart of Poland*). The emergent image of a mountain is tainted with another archaic motif belonging to folklore and folk imagination, intertwined with fairy-tale convention and stylistic, in which the afore-mentioned oneiric ambiance returns:

*The mountain peak soared into the clouds
A tall castle stood on top
With a girl imprisoned therein...
Everyone certainly recalls this tale.*

*That what the peasant storyteller wrote
What the people imagined
We shall all soon see while awake!
A fairy-tale palace is being built in Warsaw.*

*It will reach the clouds
Where birds and clouds abound*

Just like in a fairy tale, our Palace of Culture.

*That what our people could only dream of
They received as a gift from a nation-friend.*

*The girl is imprisoned no more
And does not recollect the bad years.
Glistening with red ribbons,
This girl is simply a book
From which wisdom and knowledge flow,
Preceding the march of culture.*

*Seen from afar in the very heart of Poland
It will last like faith in man,
It will last like love for a child,
It will last like Soviet friendship.
(Jan Brzechwa, *Pałac Kultury*)*

This fairy-tale motif, together with reaching the sky, growth, and height (*barely discernible to the human eye*), was developed also in other texts:

*The first foundations have already risen above the ground,
The spans of steel scaffolding climb upwards,
The canvas of a Palace more magnificent than that of
An enchanted princess is growing higher and higher.*

*There, high up, next to that cloud, the pinnacle of the spire
will glitter barely discernible to the human eye.
And a thousand windows will light up
And a torch shall burn endlessly
A symbol of profound and sincere friendship,
The most splendid ornament of a magnificent Capital.
(Adam Nowak, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*)*

Here, the most often recurring motif is that of power, radiance, an epiphany of light and lustre, as well as upward growth:

*(...) Trains carrying rocks travel from the Union.
The engine glows like a heart.
A palace is rising from the history of friendship
From a joint battle for freedom!*

*Look how it adorns heights with a lace ornament,
How it climbs upward, ever slimmer!
So that the victory of labour below
Could merge the mason and the inspired writer!*

*So that the Palace could become evidence in a battle
For the happiness of the people, for labour and peace,
So that the sons of factories and peasants
Could handle books.*

(Grzegorz Timofiejew, *Na budowę Pałacu Kultury i Nauki w Warszawie*)

A dialogue of two clouds resounds with a cosmic symbolic of the Palace, an image of a column of the heavens (a tower leaning on stars):

(...) *The mother cloud answers:*
I'm not laughing
I heard, after all,
Boria, "żhmi bistrিয়ে".
And it's a good thing when
Boria "żhmi bistrিয়ে".

I know them, each smiling
But determined.
They will build towers, pedestals
And lean them against the stars.
This is what the mother-cloud
Said tearfully:

- Flee, daughter-cloud,
I don't want to be scraped.
They floated away listlessly, far beyond the Vistula,
Over Warsaw
The sky is clear.
 (Józef Prutkowski, *Mówi chmura córce chmurce...*)

We come across cosmic symbolic also in a poem about a "crystal ball" shining from afar and topping the Palace spire, with the Sun and the Moon bending over it, an opportunity for communication and contact established between Heaven and Earth. This image becomes expanded in a magical (magic ball, seer, fortune-teller), romantic and fairy-tale mood.

On the Palace spire, where only the wind carouses,
 a crystal ball high up shines in the Sun.
 And the day - like a seer - cradles it in its hands
 casts spells and seeks the future.
 Tell me, ray of Sun, kindly,
 what do you see in that magic Warsaw ball?
 I see the completed Palace, MDM growing
 with each building looking at its reflection in the
 ball with joy!
 I see people, vehicles, gardens, streets,
 the Vistula, bridges, boulevards - the whole capital!
 I see how it is going to look tomorrow:
 larger, more populous and even lovelier!
 On the Palace spire, where only the wind carouses,
 a crystal ball shines brightly in the moonlight.
 And the night - the best fortune-teller - raises its
 hand above it,
 casts starry spells and peers into it.
 Tell me, lovely, romantic moonlight,
 what do you see in that Warsaw magic ball?

I see how it glows above, sparkles among the
 stars
 and below reflects the constellations of the town.
 I feel the breath of Warsaw deep in slumber
 and hear how early in the morning it hurries to
 work.
 Beauty will reside here and joy will make itself at
 home -
 and while aging it will grow younger!
 On the Palace spire, where only wind the wind carouses,
 a crystal ball predicts happiness for Warsaw.
 May all the radiance of the capital sparkle within
 it!
 We believe our seers: our days and nights.
 (Witold Degler, *Kryształowa kula Pałacu Kultury*)

The poetic images and experiences of the Palace of Culture concentrate motifs so characteristic for the symbolic of the centre (a permanent, strong and constant orientation point enabling transition between assorted levels of the reality of the cosmos: heaven - earth - underworld; we shall observe elements of this level also in a further part of this analysis) as well as the symbolic of the home, together with its value of the centre enabling a transition between different temporal dimensions (withdrawal and descent into the past; exit and entry into the future). The home provides an image of the past. More, ideally, the home is situated in the centre of human life and the centre (as we have seen) delineates the point of departure and the beginning (cf. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Przestrzeń i miejsce*, Warszawa 1987, p. 164). In images of the Palace of Culture we also come across symbols of the "interior of the land", "the source", "the centre", and "the heart", connected with the mythical evaluation of space and place, all of which indicate the idea of the time of the past (cf. Yi-Fu Tuan, *ibid.*, p. 161). In the case of the Palace of Culture if we are not to speak about a *sui generis* inversion of meanings (apart from the ideological premise of an architectural project), then we are certainly dealing with a much stronger accentuation of the past, and the recalled images and symbols (the home, the centre, the heart) are linked with the idea of the future tense, the new and the different, and focus predominantly on the future. Even the poem by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, setting into motion a Romantic, Mickiewicz-like topos of the "home river" and in this manner inscribing the Palace into tradition and turning towards the future, appears to be new, together with its cosmic "natural-religious" symbolic (*A house as enormous as Mt. Kościelec*).

Vistula, native river, have you ever seen
Such houses?
A tower soaring over the city to reach the Moon,

A house as enormous as Mt. Kościelec.

(Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, "Express Wieczorny", 22 July 1954)

This focus on the future, together with the Palace as an orientation point - once again with an epiphany of light - is to be discovered in a poem by Second Lieutenant Mieczysław Michalak:

*Of all the Warsaw roads the best known
leads to the site where the Palace is growing,
where the white wall shines like a bright torch
and the town's pride glimmers with light bulb eyes.*

*The hands of cranes send kind greetings
and speak to human hearts
the crane, iron but alive, speaks powerfully,
and just like man stretches its arms to the future.*

*Gazing at the people and the walls – a fraternal gift,
on the marble slab I distinctly feel
the warm hand of a worker – this is the touch of
Friendship –
and thus I send to you, Moscow, my soldierly salute.
(Z wycieczką na budowie Pałacu Kultury i Nauki)*

The Palace of Culture also appears to be a source of truth (the Palace of Truth), together with its exhilarating and rejuvenating force.

*Steel giraffes had been brought over,
steel arms have been stretched out,
steel constructions are growing upwards,
Storeys are rising in steel hands.
Two hundred metres!
Two hundred metres!
The palace is growing,
And climbing upwards!
Two hundred meters above the town!
This is friendship stretching out its arms,
it is friendship crowning the city centre!
Higher, higher! Like joy! Like a bird!
The storeys are growing just like friendship did!
The palace is growing just like friendship –
Workers', soldiers', the simplest possible!
Here, the worker and the peasant will meet,
Here truth is as straightforward as rye growing tall.
Here Moscow presents Warsaw
with its ever fresh youth and beauty.*

(Stanisław Czachorowski, *Pałac prawdy*)

In a poem by the Hungarian Ferenc Pákozdy the Palace of Culture is not merely a fount of life but alongside the already mentioned symbols and motifs it appears to be an almost holy, miraculous site (*Here is the new miracle of life*). The epiphany of light, glow, and luminescence reaches its culmination. The poem acts as testimony of mystical experiences within the range of the Palace, the site of an ecstatic transformation of the author (the lyrical subject) into sheer light (*Today, I bathe my soul in the glow (...) And change into sparkling radiance*).

*Palace of Culture and Science,
Already on my way I watched it.
Its steel climbing upwards above Warsaw.
A foretaste! A symbol! It storms the sky...*

*Rubble and ruins still all around.
Your foot still touches the past,
But friendship already glows above all
And proudly grows mightier.*

*I observe the history of the expanding construction,
A daily pilgrim to this site.
Here, thunders constantly
The pounding heart of the city.*

*On a platform - a multitude of spectators.
In their eyes I notice zeal and reflection.
Words spoken in deep thought:
This is Stalin's priceless gift!*

*This lovely palace brings such joy
As if it was being built for me.
Peace springs forth here, hearts are set alight:
Proletarian internationalism.*

*Here in each motion you feel
The Soviet touch, thought and tempo;
Here stretches a vision of the world:
A communist epoch of beauty.*

*Famous communist constructions ...
I owe their image to books;
Today, they bathe my soul in radiance
And insert the glow of the future into the present.*

*When in the evening the sky above the construction
Glimmers with sparks,
A song and thrill grow in me,
And I too change into sparkling brightness.*

*Palace of Culture and Science...
I greet it shedding tears of happiness.*

I am full of joy. Here is a new miracle of life:

The key to the future. I feel I am growing.

(Ferenc Pakozdy, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*, transl. from the Hungarian Tadeusz Fangrat)

The poem by Pakozdy is the most vivid expression of an aggressive image of the Palace envisaged as a challenge addressed to the heavens and an image containing the recognisable motif of the Tower of Babel (*It storms the sky*).

This image is a reference to the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel as interpreted by Marxist-communist ideology. The motif in question, conceived as an example of the symbol's transformation, was broached by Lotman, who with its assistance showed its essence as a copious text that *in a rolled up form* transfers the memory of culture. *Already the formula conceived by Marx, which was (...) immensely popular - "the people storm the sky" - contained a reference to the myth of the Tower of Babel subjected to dual inversion: first, the assessments of heaven and the Earth attacking it changed places, and, second, the myth about the split of the nations was replaced by an image of their merger, i.e. the International* (cf. Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, op. cit., p. 154). At this point it is worth recalling yet another interpretation of the story of the Tower of Babel, which perceives in the "punishment" consisting of mingling languages a blessing that offers protection against the temptations of totalitarianism (a single tongue, *we shall resemble the gods*): hampering the construction of the Tower and the mixture of languages are seen as a preservation of the diversity, differences, and pluralism of identity and thus freedom offered to mankind.

Features invariably stressed in all texts and evidence of experiences connected with the Palace include its height, soaring shape, and skywardness. The Palace's extraordinariness and power are summed up in its stature and dimension. The lofty Palace fascinates, attracts, and exudes magnetic allure. This was the situation from the very onset, the moment of announcing news about the gift:

The largest square of the capital, located in Marszałkowska Street, will become the site of a gigantic construction some 28-30 storeys tall (...). Polish creative thought will radiate from here across the whole country. Response to this piece of news could bring to mind associations with mass-scale reactions to a miracle: *The whole of Warsaw immediately found out about the magnificent gift of friendship, which the capital of People's Poland received from the Soviet Union – the tallest building in Poland, the Palace of Culture and Science. The inhabitants of the Capital made their way towards the construction site between Marszałkowska Street and Jerozolimskie Avenue, and Sosnowa and Świętokrzyska streets, discussing on the spot the assumed appearance of the colossus*

and its purpose... (...). Happy news stir the imagination of all residents of the Capital – declared the writer Leon Kruczkowski. This noble gift of one nation to another will be not only a durable monument of our eternal friendship. Already the very process of erecting it will affect us day after day more strongly than any word can do (...) ("Express Wieczorny", 7 April 1952).

Such was also the situation after the completion of work, when starting in January 1955 "Życie Warszawy" published voices in a discussion on the edifice growing in Stalina Square:

It is necessary to erect buildings, which in the manner of a beautiful setting will comprise a uniform whole together with the sky-high palace. The white and slender edifice stands in all its magnificence. Its soaring outline, so inseparably and for ever connected with the image of Warsaw, visible from a distance of tens of kilometres, towers above the town and daily attracts the gazes of thousands and thousands of residents of Warsaw ("Express Wieczorny", 21 January 1954). *From a 132 metres-high terrace the Saxon Garden resembles a lettuce leaf - reports "Express" (Jerzy Ciszewski, 28/29 July 1954, no. 205). How often while walking along the streets of Warsaw you turn your gaze towards the colossal outline of the Palace of Culture and Science. High up, the spire glistens in the sunlight ... the enormous white stone columns of the entrance portals beckon from afar. Our Palace is beautiful, proudly declare the inhabitants of the capital and interrupt their daily strolls for a moment to enjoy its view. Resembling a priceless pearl in its setting the white palace glows amidst sprawling green lawns.*

The special significance of this vertical dimension of the Palace, directing all sight upwards, was stressed by architect Rozhnev already at the stage of discussing the project:

The grand solid should be seen from the viewpoint of the height of a person and his raised head. People on their way to work tend to stoop; otherwise, they walk with their heads held high. Such a building is part of life – the base should be connected with man (Jak powstał projekt Pałacu Kultury, prep. M. Kledź, "Stolica", no. 23, 9 June 1985).

Fascination with height was also shared by Polish architects in the course of attempts at determining the proportions of the Palace in relation to the outline of the capital: *Architects were assisted by airmen. In order to establish the highest parts of the future palace a pilot was asked to perform a number of flights 160 and 220 metres above Warsaw. Polish and Soviet architects in assorted parts of the city and along the banks of the Vistula in the district of Praga observed the plane and in this fashion defined the height of the building while taking into consideration the general outline of the capital's architecture. Next, standing on roofs of houses adjoining the future construction site they made necessary measurements and finally arrived at a joint conclusion, namely, that the most suitable*

would be a building about 220 meters tall (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny pomnik przyjaźni*, Warszawa 1953, pp. 7-8).

Architect J. Sigalin recalled:

Soviet architects, especially Rudnev, said: That's enough: this should be just fine for the outline of Warsaw: 100-200 metres. We, the Varsovians, however (...) became victims of a height frenzy and after each turnabout of the plane issued the order: "Higher!" (the side towers were to be 60 metres tall, just like the Warszawa Hotel, and quite possibly we were more or less consciously concerned with creating a new Warsaw on a scale larger than the one delineated before the war by the Prudential or Cedergrren buildings (J. Sigalin, Warszawa 1944-1980. Z archiwum architekta, Warszawa 1986, vol. 2, p. 429).

The sacral (quasi-sacral) reality of the Palace could be testified not only by the irrational and often mystical nature of experiences associated with it, but also the language of architecture in which it speaks to us. Wojciech Włodarczyk, author of an interesting study about socialist realism (in which, unfortunately, the Palace of Culture is treated in a rather fragmentary and marginal fashion, with the author discussing only the portal of the main entrance and focusing his attention on the candelabras in Konstytucji Square), devoted much attention to the mystical dimension of this architecture (cf. W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm. Sztuka Polska w latach 1950-54*, Libella, Paris 1986, in particular chapter 3 - *Mysticism architektury*, pp. 39-53). Noting that alongside military terminology architectural vocabulary comprises the prime material of the speeches, Włodarczyk drew attention that the ideological obligations imposed upon architecture as well as socialist realistic architecture as such created a mystical communication of sorts between, and with the public. Such architecture was supposed to be a pretext for members of the public who were thus to become capable of experiencing the greatness of the epoch. The theses proposed by Włodarczyk about the mystical experience provided by the architecture of socialist realism, speaking a language characteristic for such experiences - expressed in *coincidentia oppositorum*, a union and combination of opposites - find their particular confirmation in the example of the Palace of Culture. One could say that the latter was one great *coincidentia oppositorum*, whose different dimensions on assorted levels merged contradictions and opposites. The Palace is a blend of high art and tradition with their folk counterparts, force and lightness, sound and silence, the old and the new, the local and the global, the foreign and the native. What features had not been ascribed to the Palace? They include the voice of Ewa Bandrowska-Turska and Nike from the Louvre; naturally, it had been described as the "Warsaw Eiffel Tower". The Palace, as we shall see, often combines the contradictory ambiance of fascination and horror, and for some it remains an example of order and har-

mony while for others - of chaos; it is a foretaste of freedom:

In a town closest to my heart

I shall see slender towers,

A fort, of which only

a free man is worthy.

A lantern that glows

with beauty and science.

(T. Kubiak, *Na budowę Pałacu Kultury i Nauki*),

or of rude enslavement.

All those *a m b i g u o u s* moods and meanings amassed by the Palace best demonstrate its *a m b i g u i t y* as a symbol. They also display the different dimensions and levels (either in the positive or the negative part of the Palace myth) in which it realises the fundamental function of the myth, i.e. an attempt at "expressing the inexpressible".

Testimonies of this mystical experience offered by the Palace, that unification of contradictions, are to be found in the following selected statements:

Academician Rudnev: (...) The purpose of this project is to create a uniform image of beauty that would blend with architecture into a single architectural entity with Old Warsaw (...) The uppermost part of the building seems to dissolve in the air; just like the voice of Ewa Bandrowska-Turska spans from silence to uppermost crystal clear sounds so we too, in the construction of this building, must strive towards creating a lightness of form, a magnificence of the forms of the erected edifice in a transition from the monumental lower parts... (J. Sigalin, Warszawa..., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 435).²⁷

The Palace of Culture and Science is a work of the Soviet architectural school, exceptionally apt in its location, dimension, and fragmentation of the solid. (...) The impression made by the building is lightness, joyfulness, nativeness, and the feeling that it almost has been a part of Warsaw (J. Minorski, O projekcie szkicowym Pałacu Kultury i Nauki, "Architektura" 1952, no. 7-8).

Helena Syrkusowa spoke during a discussion held at a meeting of architects:

The Palace of Culture and Science has become a part of Warsaw. It was feared that it might be a stranger but it turned into a tuning fork of New Warsaw (J. Sigalin, Warszawa..., op. cit., vol. 3, p. 83).

The synthesis of high and low (folk) tradition was also considered: *The Palace of Culture and Science is not supposed to be merely great - it is to be beautiful. As the central building in Warsaw, the socialist capital of Poland, it should possess the characteristic features of Polish architecture, elements borrowed from the treasury of Polish architectural culture. Soviet designers thus went on a trip across Poland. They examined the historical monuments of Cracow and the buildings of Zamość, raised in the magnificent Renaissance style. Their sketchbooks recorded successive fragments of the pearls of architecture in Kazimierz, Chełmno, Kielce and Toruń. They noticed*

and noted all the distinctive traits of our architecture, all the most splendid fragments of buildings-remnants of the epoch of the zenith of this art in our country. Finally, they departed and once again the studios of Moscow became the site of busy work. A project was made. This work, whose outcome was the emergence of a project of the Palace, is described by Lev Rudnev, member of the Academy of Architecture of the USSR.

“We spent much time examining the special features of Polish national architecture before we chose a variant of the project and definitely established the architecture of the building. We reached for Polish folk art, travelled across Polish towns, observed Warsaw rising from the ruins, sought the advice of Polish architects. We discovered a common language with Polish architecture – and this proved decisive for the success of our project. The style of the Palace is synchronised with the most beautiful examples of Polish architecture and, at the same time, it is quite new. It must be stressed that the foundation of Polish architecture is – if one eliminates foreign borrowings - associated with the people, with life. It is light and airy, does not encumber man but elevates him” (...).

Premises similar to those that inspired the construction of Moscow skyscrapers lie at the basis of the conceptions of the Warsaw Palace of Culture. We saw how it is possible to adapt it to the words of a resolution pertaining to Moscow skyscrapers, which are to be “original in their architectural-artistic composition and connected with the historical architecture of the town”. Just as in their case, the Palace of Culture should not be, and will not be “a repetition of models of multi-storey buildings known abroad”. (J. Dąbrowski, *Pałac Kultury i Nauki*, Mała Biblioteka TWP, Warszawa 1953, pp. 7-8 and 25-26).

This whole enormous edifice will be raised in the spirit of Polish masterpieces of architecture. (...) In the Palace of Culture and Science we see dynamics characteristic for Polish architectural models: the massive main building is topped by a boldly soaring, much narrower spire. The architectural solution of the lower fragments of the Palace brings to mind somewhat the Cracow Cloth Halls, while the congress hall, a semi-rotunda, contains elements of the Barbican, so typical for Polish architecture.

The outstanding artistic assets of the building were jointly accentuated by Polish architects requested to assess the project. They declared that the building is a harmonious part of the development of Warsaw and excellently composed into its panorama (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny ...*, op. cit., pp. 9-10).

It was also said that the Palace of Culture is a combination of the Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classicism.

Engineer architect Skibniewski asserted that the in the stylisation of the building Soviet architects resorted to the examples of the most outstanding works of the Cracow Renaissance. The building also reflects the tranquil Clas-

sicism of Warsaw architecture. Prof. Biegański drew attention to certain features of the architectural similarity of the Palace to Polish historical architecture. (...) Engineer architect Stepiński, discussing **the harmonious blend of the architectural elements of Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classicism**, declared that it is precisely this feature that grants the Palace the qualities of equanimity (...). Academician Rudnev discussed the guidelines of the work performed by the architects and accentuated that “they strove towards creating an atmosphere of warmth, love and respect for man, so that everyone, both a child and an adult, would want to come and relax here”. (J. Dąbrowski, *Podniebny...*, op. cit., pp. 10-12).

The phantom centre of the world

The above-cited texts showing the Palace of Culture as a unity of contradictions outline the successive motif of our reflections and inevitably lead towards the symbolism of the centre. This involves questions about the extent to which it is a constant point enabling orientation in the world, the degree to which it amasses echoes and is the reverse of traditional, archaic conceptions of the “centre of the world” described by Eliade (cf. M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*, Warszawa 1978, chapter II: *Element rzeczywistości mitycznej*). The extent to which it is not only that constant “absolute” point of support enabling orientation but also a centre that established “our world”, the “Cosmos”, whose order opposes “chaos”, the same “centre of the world” as each temple and palace that summarise the world and act as its image. These issues are directly connected with the way in which the Palace of Culture preserves and contains the structure and character of a sacred site.

While responding to those questions, which can be reduced to a single query concerning the manner in which the symbolism of the centre is recorded in the Palace of Culture, we are compelled to preserve additional caution.

First, we must remember about the “frame” of the Palace, the specific site in which it had been situated. Marta Zielińska wrote in *Studium o Placu Defilad*:

At the northern and southern edge of the square, more or less at the level of Poznańska Street, the pavement features two commemorative plaques. There used to be a third one, but I did not find it - it had vanished behind the fencing around the construction site. Probably no other city has similar tablets, which do not commemorate people or events but mark ordinary street crossings. The inscription on one of them says: “Here was the crossing of Chmielna and Wielka streets”. “Was” – now these are the ghosts of crossings, symbolic gravestones – so popular here. (...) Nor do I know who came across this idea but I do know that it enabled the spirit of Warsaw to speak, the spirit of a town deprived of a sufficiently solid and unchanged material foundation that now seeks refuge in ideal be-

ings, namely, in words and letters.²⁸ This is expressed by the protagonist of Tadeusz Konwicki's film *How Far Away, How Near*, setting out on his way home into the past or the future (he obviously finds it difficult to define the direction) from the main entrance of the Palace of Culture, against a current of a group of visitors, late and dashing into the Palace interior.²⁹ He is the protagonist of a film in which the Palace plays a considerable role, is shown from time to time, and is used as a setting for events transpiring in the course of the journey: *The towering outline of the Palace of Culture conceals the setting Sun*. Above it, in the memorable scene opening the film, the figure of a Hassidic Jew (the Eternal Wanderer?) flies amidst clouds – an image of a condemned soul cast into the void of Hell or lifted into the heavens, high above the Palace and the crossing of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street.³⁰ The protagonist of the film turns to the ghost of a friend who had committed suicide: *You see, Maks, this is our whole town. So often occupied by foreigners, tortured, and razed to the ground. Our town. Sometimes in the centre of Europe, upon other occasions East European.*³¹ Keep in mind the city's specific and unclear, phantom-like character and status, this exclusive ambiguity of the "centre" and "heart" of Poland.

Secondly, remember the principle accompanying assorted symbols, namely, that just as in the case of heretofore considered themes and symbolic motifs associated with the Palace so in this case, when we are talking about the Palace and the symbolism of the centre, *the content only flickers through the expression and the latter only indicates the content by means of allusion*.

This phenomenal and illusory nature of the Palace and its phantom-like quality are stressed in numerous texts:

It was spring, probably May, at sunrise, wrote Gustaw Morcinek. I leaned out of the train arriving in Warsaw and suddenly I saw the soaring, white outline of the Palace of Culture in the rising Sun. The sky was deep blue, and in it - the immersed white silhouette of the Palace of Culture. It resembled a phantom and mainly brought to my mind Nike from the Parisian Louvre. It cast a spell on me with its extraordinarily slim, towering, skyward shape, and just like the other Nike it spoke of victory and faith in man ("Trybuna Robotnicza", 12 April 1972).

Attention to this phenomenal quality and dematerialisation of socialist realistic architecture was drawn by Włodarczyk – the inclination to encumber architecture with ideological obligations and duties occurred parallel with a tendency towards a "dematerialisation" of the building, erecting it in a painterly fashion, concealing its geometry and tectonics underneath expanded ornaments (cf. W. Włodarczyk, *Socrealizm*, op. cit., p. 41).

Whenever the idea of the centre of the world is being considered it is simply impossible to omit citing a poem by Tadeusz Kubiak, which alongside home motifs (a nest,

a swallow nesting next to a beam) contains an outright inversion of this idea. In traditional versions, the "centre" is an orientation point and marks four parts of the world, but in the case of the Palace *the diversity of parts of the world vanishes* in its beauty. The pinnacle of the Palace directs our sight (in accordance with the original meaning of the word in Polish) only to the East whence one can see the Don, the Volga. and an outline of the Ural Mts.

*Only love for daily objects as simple
as a chisel, a masonry hammer, or
a trowel, and belief in works produced by the human
hand*

*can attach us in an hour of the greatest heat wave
or even in the downpour rustling among leaves,
will not allow us to abandon the scaffolding that con-
ceals walls.*

*This poem passed the test, my friend,
when we recently traversed
the storeys of the Palace of Culture.
I have often watched labour and great toil,
the busy swallow carrying in its beak
a lump of soil to a nest next to a beam,
or human hands like swallow wings,
hovering over work and love
that fills your heart.*

Friend, recall -

*This is what I spoke to you about -
when the Palace of Culture stood
in front of us, like a nest. Like a monument.
I know how much heart is needed to build as if for
oneself
in a city whose name differs so much from
that of your hometown. When the night puts out the
star*

*and day lights the Sun
– to submerge oneself like a deep sea diver
with a diving suit and a blowtorch
into the artificial stars of fire
into the vertical steel construction, or to climb up-
wards
along a wall as steep as a precipice.*

*My friend. The
diversity of parts of the world will vanish
in the beauty of the Palace of Culture.
I am familiar with longing for that wondrous moment
when hands rest on a completed work.
Those on the highest storey, with hands
raised to their forehead, may see scrubs along the Don,
green birches along the Volga and the outline of the
Ural Mts.
while I shall be entering interiors of marble in War-
saw.*

*Friend, thus each day links us with the distant
and each brick of the Palace of Culture - with each
other.*

(Tadeusz Kubiak, *Rozmowa na budowie Pałacu Kultury w Warszawie wiosną 1953 roku*, from the cycle: *Miłość prawdziwa*).

The Palace of Culture is also an untypical centre because it lies... to the side. This eccentricity was stressed upon numerous occasions: in Warsaw all large streets lead towards the sky. None ends with some sort of an architectural accent - apart from the unfortunate candelabras in Konstytucji Square. Situating the Palace of Culture and Science eccentrically vis a vis the largest municipal arteries is yet more proof that architects do not fear draughts and are fond of endless street vistas. (...) The Palace does not close any large artery of the capital. Its outline is distinctly seen from Służewiec or Stara Miłosna, but at the crossing of Nowy Świat Street with the Avenue, or Marszałkowska Street with Wspólna Street it disappears, concealed by nondescript town houses (Jerzy Putrament, O 'elewactwie' i innych sprawach warszawskich, "Życie Warszawy", 15 January 1955).

This strange centre, better noticeable in the town peripheries and along its edges - expressed by the poetic intuition of Adam Nowak as "the most magnificent ornament of a splendid capital" - concentrated attention and disturbed serious architects who while discussing the solution of Stalina (Defilad) Square, the centre and the East Wall, stressed the inconsistency of the Palace, *which already has a place of its own in the panorama of Warsaw (...) but the accessibility of this central location of the Palace of Culture is simultaneously rather limited* (cf. J. Sigalin, *Warszawa*, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 77). At the same time, references were made to exemplary models of such superb solutions as Place de la Concorde in Paris, where arteries connected the central square with the whole town, rue Rapalle, Place de la Madeleine, and all the other reasons why: *When in Paris, it is impossible not to cross Place de la Concorde and to ignore the obelisk brought by Napoleon I from Luxor, whilst when we observe the Palace of Culture we rarely see it, and its location in the centre of Warsaw appears to be some sort of a paradox* (J. Sigalin, *ibid.*). In order to prevent this, other Parisian models were evoked, and the Palace of Culture was compared to the Eiffel Tower: *Together with my colleagues at the studio we tried to insert the outline of the Palace of Culture into that of the Eiffel Tower because there is a certain affiliation between those two monuments* (*ibid.*). It was also suggested to turn to the legacy left behind by Le Notre, the esplanade of the magnificent solution of the Versailles Park next to the palace (*ibid.*, p. 85).

Apparently, the Palace of Culture links opposites and assorted motifs constituting its "absence of clarity" and ambivalence. It connected motifs of the South and the North (Cracow Renaissance and Warsaw Classi-

cism), the East and the West (scrubland along the Don and an outline of the Ural Mts.; the Eiffel Tower and the Versailles gardens), reflecting the following principles of a town: *Sometimes in the centre of Europe, upon other occasions East European*. It appears to be either a non-integrated particle or a synthesis of national architecture, according to all the rules of the Barthesian principle of the myth as its "natural centre". (*Studying the national features of Polish architecture... finally made it possible to create a project that will be completely new for the town and merge with it organically, creating a natural centre of the Capital* - cf. J. Dąbrowski, *Palac...*, op. cit., p. 9). Paradoxically, the Palace of Culture also blends within itself the order of the "Cosmos" and "Chaos". We come across two competing experiences: Chaos and Order, the native "Cosmos", in the already cited study by Marta Zielińska. First, when she wrote:

*Today, the square is fading more and more. The chaos of this site is astounding considering that this is the centre of, after all, a European capital and vividly negates the name it was once granted. Scarce passers-by vanish in the distance, following some sort of invisible trails playing the part of streets; cars circulate just as helplessly, while large trucks and buses park nearby. From the side of the Avenue one sees fences and digs, and from Świętokrzyska Street - the remnants of stalls with few haphazard traders; all this is encircled along the edges with quite young but already sickly trees. Recently, there appeared a pickled whale, probably to supplement the chaos. This text was written several years ago and today the described mayhem is increased even further by an international, free-market "bazaar" and one of the first "sex-shops" situated in a stall maintained in a camping-Mazovian-Podhale style, all amplified with the lowing of suffering cattle left for the night with no water in trucks parked in the square - as the press and radio informed recently. Describing Defilad Square, Zielińska noticed: *Strangely and even symbolically it reflects the plight of Warsaw, the entire convoluted history of the last 150 years. History (...) has made a circle: the square was once a meadow with chaotically scattered wooden houses and planted trees, and now, contrary to all architects' plans, it once again comes close to this appearance.**

True, the Palace stands but one has to look up in order to see it, because normally from the vantage point of a pedestrian only its particular wings detached from each other and not comprising a sensible whole can be seen in the distance. It is much too large to be embraced, and thus has disintegrated into pieces: the bottom and the top are separate, and in addition the bottom has collapsed into several fragments. He who finds himself at the foot of the Palace gazes mainly at empty space on all three sides of the world.

Alongside this Cubist experience of the Palace, enhancing the associated feeling of chaos, we find an

entirely different confession. The author, a contemporary of the Palace, added:

I appreciated the Palace's height and was uninterested in the contents. Whenever I returned to Warsaw from my vacations I always waited for the moment when a tiny Palace of Culture would appear from afar. "Oh, the Palace" - we would call out and enjoy the pleasant awareness that home was near. In other words, a semblance of a lighthouse effect. I cannot say that I did not experience sympathy of sorts, especially towards the Palace swiderviewed from a distance, for example, from the banks of the Vistula in Świder. As long as I remained within its range I knew that I would not get lost and if anything should happen I would always find my way – I even tried to traverse this route in my childish imagination (p. 124).

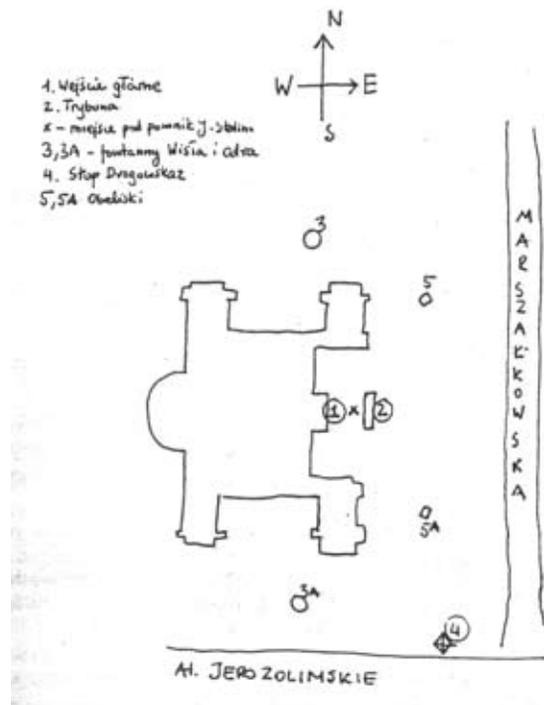
Having recorded all these paradoxes and *sui generis* splits in the perception of the Palace now let us go back to the original ideological premise at its basis and pay some attention to the symbolism of the centre recorded within. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the Palace constituted an essential novelty on the city plan. Situated along a former edge, on the site of former chaos, the Palace, together with the sequence of Marszałkowska Street starting from the MDM, the planned centre (today: the East Wall), and Stalina (Defilad) Square, created a parallel and simultaneously competing sequence to the Old Warsaw Route, the Royal Route running from the Old Town, the Royal Castle, Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, Nowy Świat Street, Ujazdowskie Avenue, "across" Łazienki Park and Belweder Palace all the way to Wilanów – a sequence marked by history and the extensive symbolics connected with the history of the town and country. Warsaw is a specific city, whose "centre", brimming with historical symbols, stretches parallel to the Vistula along the Royal Route and the North-South axis. The location of the Palace not only created a competitive, new centre progressing parallel along the same axis but accentuated the East-West direction, insignificant apart from the Saxon, Stanisławowska, and Ujazdowska axes.

Architects and observers often complained that the town "runs away from the Vistula", that it does not descend towards the river and remains unconnected with its right-bank part as if unaware of certain logic in such an accentuation of the North-South axis reflecting the course of the Vistula connecting Cracow, Warsaw, and Gdańsk (since, as Piotr Skrzynecki repeated after Wiesław Dymny: *We have friends on three sides, but the sea only on one*). It is precisely along the Vistula and upon the basis of anthropological research and measurements that Talko-Hryncewicz determined the ethnographic boundary between Asia and Europe, the East and the West.

Placing the Palace of Culture in the western part of the town not only emphasised the direction towards

which the city turned its back, but also realised the rule of a temple, sacral orientation. The less important side walls of the Palace sprawled between the South and the North, while its "altar", ritual part, if this is how we may describe the platform from which all parades and marches were to be watched, the statues in front of the façade, and the portal of the main entrance faced the East. (It is here, to the East Wall, that it was planned to transfer the "town hall" and administration offices while discussing solutions concerning the new centre and the best way to display the Palace - whether to introduce arches and colonnades or leave wider open space).

In order to illustrate this new valorisation in the mythical geography of the town here is a plan making it possible to better follow its symbolic-centric contents:



1. Main entrance
2. Stand
3. Site of planned statue of J. Stalin
4. Odra and Vistula fountains
5. Pillar-road sign
- 5A. Obelisks

Marszałkowska Street

In 1953 the Palace of Culture and Science was granted the name of Joseph Stalin (*When in distant Moscow the great heart of Comrade Stalin, friend of the Polish people, leader of the working masses all over the world, ceased to beat, the Government of People's Poland passed a resolution... - J. Dąbrowski, Podniebny..., op.*

cit.). It was also decided to place in front of the main entrance a monument (on the competition for the design cf. the reminiscences of Henryk Urbanowicz: *The most eccentric was a statue of Stalin by Xawery Dunikowski – the Master proposed a granite sculpture made of great blocks comprising the whole figure, including the head. The direct intervention of the artist was to be limited to a minimum. Enormous legs-shoes, built of slabs, trampled the ground, and the figure, usually depicted while breathing out, this time inhaled deeply, slightly swelling the cheeks and, indifferent and menacing, appeared to be spitting on the whole world* – “Stolica”, 14 November 1988; cf. Grażyna Stankiewicz, *Jak powstał PKiN*, “Res Publica”, 1990, no. 3).

The project was never implemented but the importance of the undertaking is testified by a discussion held by sculptors and architects deliberating whether the remaining statues from the Palace facade should be sitting or standing. *I can imagine Mickiewicz sitting. But for Kościuszko to sit?; the figures were to include men of science, artists, freedom fighters, and heroes. The pantheon was to be composed of Chopin, Curie-Skłodowska, Copernicus, Mickiewicz, Lelewel, Matejko, and “couples”: Bogusławski - Staszic, Kollątaj - Śniadecki, Kościuszko - Świerczewski or Marchlewski - Waryński, as well as Frycz-Modrzewski, Wit Stwos, and Jan of Kolno, albeit the last three gave rise to doubts: There are no photographs (cf. *Więszego wyboru pozycji nie ma* – minutes from a discussion, prep. Jacek Królak, “Res Publica” 1990, no. 3, pp. 34-40). The only remnants of those projects are two executed sculptures (both of sitting figures) at the sides of the main entrance: Adam Mickiewicz (by Ludwika Nitschowa) and Copernicus (by Stanisław Horno-Popławski). Next to a synthesis and a quintessence of the masterpieces of Polish architecture (*We showed then all the historical monuments of Warsaw, Cracow, Toruń, Kazimierz on the Vistula, Puławy, Płock, Czerwińsk, Nieborów, and Kielce - and they kept taking photographs... . They became acquainted with the Tatra Mts., Żelazowa Wola, Nieszawa (...). We presented them with albums showing Krasiczyn, Baranów, Sandomierz, and Gdańsk. They admired paintings by Canaletto - cf. J. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 430*), elements of the symbolism of the centre and the image of the world contained in the ideological premises of the Palace and the square include:*

1. The above mentioned sitting figures of Copernicus and Mickiewicz, and 29 sculptures standing in semi-circular niches in the Palace walls and portraying figures from all over the world (cf. Jerzy Janicki, op. cit., p. 28).

2. The government stand with an eagle (the emblem of the People's Republic of Poland); originally, it was planned to display the eagle above the platform, next to, i.a. semi-reclining figures personifying the

Vistula and the Odra (cf. Grażyna Stankiewicz, *Jak powstał Pałac Kultury*, typescript, p. 71).

3. A granite obelisk (at the corner of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street, at present disassembled for the duration of redesigning an underground passage and the construction of the metro) indicating directions and distances to all European capitals and more important Polish cities - of slight usefulness for drivers but what symbolics! *The heart of the matter lies in distances to Warsaw, its centre, and the central square. And from here - a window onto the world!* (cf. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 147), that celebrated pillar of laughter mentioned by L. Stomma in a fragment concerning the mythical dimension of geography (in: *Z zapisków etnologa*, a letter send by L. Stomma to the editors: *Słoń a sprawa etnologii*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1982, no. 1-4). *The construction of this road sign historically refers to Polish road signs - a granite road sign in Konin dating from 1511 and still extant, measuring the precise distance between Konin and Kruszwica* (“*Życie Warszawy*”, 18 July 1955).

4. Two colour water walls separate Defilad Square from Jerozolimskie Avenue and Świętokrzyska Street. *Nine metre-high streams will be produced by fountains symbolising the Vistula and the Odra* (“*Express Wieczorny*”, 20/21 July 1955).

(In other words, the Vistula and the Odra were situated along the East-West axis – sic! Z. B.).

5. *A sundial without dials, in which a ray of the Sun is to measure man's time on Earth* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.). Actually, there were to be two such dials, one, lemniscate-type, near the Pavilions of the Śródmieście (City Centre) Train Station, and the other, analematic, in a park in Świętokrzyska Street. Or rather ... a complete explanation is offered by the Master, Docent Przymkowski, in connection with the damage incurred by vandals: *In 1954 I measured, and a year later outlined eight sundials next to the Palace of Culture. A large, analematic dial, in whose case man himself is the dial (so that no one may steal it again), and seven lemniscate-type ones, which were to show time from dawn to twilight. This is one of the few sundials in the world to indicate user time. Unfortunately, the face was executed on a frail pivot. Consequently, it was supplemented already several times and all told in the past 15 years the dial worked for perhaps half a year. I can present the documentation on a subbotnik basis* (“*Express Wieczorny*”, 30/31 May 1970).

6. Garden, 3,6 hectares.

Trees and shrubs came from all over Poland. *Magnificent oaks were offered by Szczecin, maples - by Śrem, spruce and rhododendrons came from Wrocław, linden trees - from the voivodeship of Lublin, with the whole of Poland contributing to arranging the Palace Park* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.). 20 000 trees according to specially selected species: linden, hornbeam, beeches, plane trees, rowan trees, poplars, apple trees, birch, spruce,

firs and oaks, Japanese cherry, yews, and about 10 000 shrubs and perennials representing sixty species, including rhododendrons and azaleas, were brought from all over the country (cf. J. Sigalin, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 146).

7. *The Congress Hall – here future peace congresses will be held, words about peace will be spoken in all languages of the world* [and addressed to the West – Z. B.]. *The Palace is to become a centre of science and culture, a site radiating the wisdom and beauty of our nation* (Jerzy Janicki, op. cit.).

8. One of the largest squares in Europe, *the site of demonstrations held by 700 000 people* (“Express Wieczorny”, 18 January 1954); two vertical obelisks (see: explanation further on).

9. Tables with brass letters: “Here stood the clock tower of the Warsaw-Vienna Rail Station”, “Pańska Street”, “Złota Street”, “Wielka Street”, “Śliska Street”, “Chmielna Street”.

Owing to the symbolic of the centre (next to allusive traditional elements: mountains, cliffs, towers, water, trees-garden, columns - all characteristic for a holy site) just as important are calculations made by statisticians creating a *sui generis* tradition of the central character of the Palace, whose reference points are Vladivostok and Madrid:

Placed one next to another the bricks used for building the Palace of Culture and Science would take up space from Warsaw to Vladivostok (“Express Wieczorny”, 5 April 1955).

Stretched out, the electric, water main, and air-conditioning ducts would achieve a length of 2 500 000 m = 2 500 km, i.e. more or less the distance from Warsaw to Madrid (“Express Wieczorny”, 27 April 1955).

If we were to remove the floor in each interior and place it on the ground we would create a square with sides 400 m = 160 000 m² large; such a square, which does not exist in Warsaw, could accommodate four Ujazdowski Parks and serve enormous demonstrations attended by hundreds of thousands (“Express Wieczorny”, 27 April 1955).

If a child were born in the Palace and without leaving it slept there every night in a different room it would exit the building at the age of 22 (ibidem).

Six days are needed to tour the whole Palace, stopping only for a single minute in each interior (“Express Wieczorny”, 5 April 1955).

A May Day demonstration was first held in front of the Palace on 1 May 1955. Next to drawings and photographs of the Palace there also appeared a special occasion poem reflecting the ambiance of the Central Square:

*North, South,
West and East
The Pole and the equator
The village and the town*

*A tiny cottage and a skyscraper
A French port and the Chinese Wall
The worker, the peasant, our friend and brother
And the whole globe
And the whole world
Celebrate May Day
In Spain provocateurs and spies
Will go out to roam
The prison will be filled
With political prisoners
But a piece of red fabric hangs
Even from the thickest grates
On the fresh grave of Belojanis
Someone placed a red flower
Fathers, mothers,
Sons, daughters,
Soldiers, six year-olds
Arranged into fours
Or better still into tens!
Wider, wider, wider
The spinners of Łódź
The dockers of Gdańsk
Or better still in hundreds
More, more, more!
Peasants and workers
a hundred thousands each!
More, more. More!
Peasants and workers
A hundred thousand each!
On this day with red flags,
that socialist nerve system
The world makes a fraternal sign:
Peace – Victory – Redness
A ship, an airplane, an automobile
Together with us! With us!
Soldiers of peace – join the march
Of millions!
We shall put an end to all scoundrels.
Tear off the heads of hydras.
Across Asia, Europe, America*

*We carry the colour Red -
Black Negroes
Yellow Chinese
Brown Hindus - all red
The banner is raised by the Russians
Red in every land
Red enhancing the streets
Red must win
Overcome the reactionary black!
(J. Prutkowski, 1 Maja, “Express Wieczorny”, 1 May 1955)*

Newspapers announced in connection with the emergence of the Palace of Culture and the progress of the construction work, nearing its end: *In ten years*

Warsaw will be the most beautiful city in the world ("Express Wieczorny", 21/22 July 1954).

Already in 1955 in a letter from Silesia Gustaw Morcinek, having toured the "Warsaw" cinema, the MDM, Marszałkowska Street and the Old Town, wrote: ... *When I saw the Palace of Culture I thought - Farona Kandego* [a Silesian expletive]! *Today Warsaw is already the loveliest town in the world* ("Życie Warszawy", 15 January 1955).

The ceremonial opening of the Palace took place on 22 July 1955 in connection with celebrations of the state holiday of the People's Republic of Poland.

Three years ago we stood in this square with our Soviet friends, builders (...) and together with the Soviet comrades we threw kopeks and groszy pieces into the still soft concrete for luck, according to an old builders' custom (from a speech given by Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz, Palace Chronicle, 1955). The Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students took place in Warsaw in August 1955, thus making a specific contribution to experiencing the symbolism of the centre associated with the Palace, next to which assorted events, festivities, and the closing march-demonstration were held. Alongside information about the festival being attended by representatives of almost every nation in the world mention was also made of such symbolic accents as placing next to a clock, *in the middle of a large circle with a diameter of 5,4 metres, a compass rose situated according to parts of the world* ("Express Wieczorny", 11 July 1955), while the banners of all nations were affixed on a mast at the corner of Jerozolimskie Avenue and Marszałkowska Street, near a granite signpost, ("Express Wieczorny", 31 July/1 August 1955). The Palace of Culture became an essential emblem of the festival - *vide* a special-occasion poster showing the globe and on it a map of Europe featuring in the centre the rising Palace; above, a white dove of peace soars, below - inscriptions: "Pax, Pokój, Frieden", and underneath - three heads: pale with "European" features, yellow with slanting eyes, and black (cf. "Express Wieczorny", 31 July/1 August 1955).

The Palace of Culture seems to have been an extraordinary place, the source of admiration and fascination. Its descriptions and testimonies contain a conspicuous element of *mirum* (the marvellous). The ceremonial mood was embedded already in the ideological premises of the building, turning it into a *sui generis* holy site:

The approach of a noisy group of citizens intending to enter the Palace of Culture and Science requires a democratic openness of forms to be fulfilled by the entrance porticos and portals, whose artistic message introduced those entering to an elevated mood of anticipating the important experiences awaiting them (Jan Minorski, op. cit.).

The visitors remained under a great impression of the Palace and faced it with admiration and fascination:

During our tour it was impossible to examine everything. Our heads are already spinning from an excess of impressions. We saw the enormous halls of the Museum of Technology (...). We walked on oaken stairs, touched profiled doorknobs cast in bronze, noiselessly shut behind us scores of splendid doors. We passed whole brigades of stucco masters, carpenters, and fitters. It seemed that all those people are caressing each fragment (Jerzy Ciszewski, *Z tarasu...*, "Express Wieczorny", 28/29 July 1954).

The microclimate is watched over by an invisible keeper protecting the interior against an influx of cold air. Special filters provide the whole building with fresh mountain air devoid of dust ("Express Wieczorny", 1 January 1954).

Fascination does not become obliterated with the passage of time; on the contrary, such experiences grew more vivid. The vulnerable adoration produced by the Palace was described by Kazimierz Koźniewski, who called the Palace the symbol of our times:

When one and a half years ago I toured the interior the impression of space was not all that great. Today, its enormity simply overwhelms: I face this quantity of rooms full of helpless admiration. I have the impression that one can explore the entire Palace not more than once in a lifetime (Symbol naszego czasu, "Życie Warszawy", 2 May 1955).

At the same time, the Palace is a symbol of new relations between free nations (ibid.).

This symbolic and sacral character intended by the authors of the Palace and its decorations was often expressed directly:

(Director Motyka): *I told engineer Sigalin that my reservations pertain to the form of the allegories and that symbols would be more appropriate. It is irrelevant whether they are to be portrayed with the help of angels or the muses. For me they are all sculptures. We can depict Polish-Soviet friendship as an angel bestowing a blessing, etc.*

(...) *It is necessary to reflect whether certain abstract phenomena cannot be really expressed in any other way than only according to the conventions of the Baroque or the Renaissance. Everyone was struck by the fact that these sculptures are so old-fashioned while the Palace is thoroughly modern.*

(Colleague Wiśniewski): *The sculptures must be deified and depict extraordinary figures. The Palace of Culture is not an ordinary residential house, but there is talk of featuring ordinary people. These must be metaphorically sanctified figures.*

(Director Motyka): *You executed the statue Peacetime Frontier – a girl wearing an ordinary dress, and still no one claims that she is a mere worker. This is a symbol, a synthesis of the convictions of certain people. This must be a synthesis of our times, and, simultaneously, sanctified. Otherwise, we would be forced to draw the conclusion that*

we are incapable of creating new forms for sanctifying new times (Więszego wyboru pozycji nie ma, "Res Publica" 1990, no. 3.)

Experiences connected with the Palace interiors and symbolics also reflect its sacral dimension. The Palace tradition knows of numerous visitors behaving as if they were worshipping in church, as in the case described by Hanna Krall:

(Mr. Klein, head of order-keeping services): *A medical doctor is summoned, in my opinion quite incorrectly, to people kneeling, just like in church, in front of a bas-relief symbolising peace and prosperity. This enormous statue, dripping with gilt, shows a female symbolising the motherland, a dove (peace), an ear of grain (good harvest), a child (motherhood), and many other symbols, and to all intents and purposes, as the Palace architect engineer Adamkiewicz says, no one really knows what it depicts because the builders did not leave any pertinent instructions. When behind the figure, further on, a door opens and a brightly lit hall is seen the mood becomes so splendid and uplifting that everyone feels the urge to kneel; why call the doctor immediately?* ("Polityka", 19 July 1975).

Not only did the Palace spire draw the gazes of the local residents, fascinate, and attract but it possessed a specific magnetic force. This magnetism and sacral dimension of the Palace are evidenced by ... a portfolio of "untypical correspondence" in the possession of Hanna Szczubelek, who keeps the Palace Chronicle. All sorts of letters personify the Palace, addressed as: "Dear Palace", and make miscellaneous requests. Faith in power capable of resolving mundane needs is intermixed with a *sui generis* symbolism of the centre - the Palace was envisaged as the seat of the government and the residence of Party first secretaries (probably due to associations produced by the Congress Hall). Here, all local and world issues converge and the correspondence constitutes a unique votive body. Naturally, the letters are full of symptoms of sheer pathology (also in the more profound meaning of the word, i.e. suffering) and madness, which so often adjoins the *sacrum*. Apparently, the Palace, in the manner of every *sacrum*, attracted also insanity. The correspondence comes from different periods; note that the last letter was written in 1989. Whenever possible, I add dates in parentheses.

The best example of the sacral can be the conviction that the Palace is the residence of Santa Claus; Ania from Sokółka wrote: *Dear Santa, I know that you live in Warsaw on the uppermost storey of the Palace of Culture. Pay me a visit this Christmas and bring me an inflatable mattress.*

2. Authors of the letters turned to the Palace for assistance in resolving property disputes: *Dear Palace, help me: a neighbour has seized my balk.*³²

3. The omnipotence of the Palace of Culture was also connected with a conviction that it contained

some sort of a special archive, a thesaurus of information, as indicated by the address on one of the letters: **Fortified Archive at the Palace of Culture**, whose author, an owner of an old model of a Sonatina radio set, sought bulb wire unavailable on the market.

4. Belief in the demonic power of the Palace is reflected in a letter addressed to: **The State Palace of Culture. Department of employment and destruction: Please destroy (...) and her three children, named (...).** *These superfluous people are condemned to be annihilated. Starve them as soon as possible.*

5. The letters also include offers, with one of the authors proposing (1980): *To the Director of the Palace of Culture. I, the above mentioned, inform that I am in the possession of items worth about half a million zlotys, all for sale, including a palace, a church and museum exhibits.* (The letter also requests transport facilities since the objects do not fit into a passenger car).

6. The Palace of Culture was the addressee of an artist wishing to open a Museum of Matchstick Art, the only of its sort in Poland; the author, *a winner of numerous prizes and with many accomplishments, including, naturally, international ones, would like to win a world record in vertical construction* and proposed to make a model of the Palace.

7. Here is Wanda TL, ready to work as:

1. *A personal office boy of the Secretary General.* 2. *a flat-rate fee employee.* 3. *Chief of the Security Service of Poland.* 4. *a Polish TV collaborator (independent office boy) offering the following services: electronic protection of diplomatic outposts accredited in Poland and their residences..., electronic protection of foreign guests – heads of state, protection of international congresses and meetings in the so-called antipodes.*

8. The author of a letter from Ząbkowice Śląskie asked for help concerning a lack of response to a previous letter on the same topic, *which must have been seized by a mentally ill civil servant. I am not surprised that You keep such workers. Socialist youth as a whole suffers from mental disorders.*

9. One of the letters is addressed to: *First Secretary Comrade Edward Gierek – Congress Hall* (and contains an invitation to the 1978 Poznań Fair).

10. The healing powers of the Palace or its special climatic properties were indicated in 1982 in a request for temporary accommodation. The author, on his way to Szczyrk to a Fund of Workers Vacation centre, asked whether for health reasons he could obtain accommodation for several years: *I was at the Stalin Palace some ten years ago, but could not find out anything since everyone was queuing up for food, "Trojka" was closed, all were hungry and drank scalding tea – quite unacceptable. I was, therefore, forced to send a letter to my son from the Palace post office telling him "what is happening at the Palace".*

11. The Palace was also perceived as a centre of power, as in a letter addressed to: **The Ideological President of the All-Russia Communist Party Bolsheviks of the Republic of Poland** (1989), and containing sheer gibberish, starting with: *On the eve of the third five-year plan ...*

12. The letters also reflect an eschatological dimension and ambiance:

To the Kind Government of the Palace of Culture
I, Leo, Son of the First Creator,
Write to You, the genuine Government,
The great troublemaker will overturn the globe
Since it is high time
To send me part of my dues through a postman (...).

13. We also come across a complaint full of concern and addressed to the **Central Council of Trade Unions Congress Hall** (1974), informing: *Young people go coatless, and postulating to create a 5% unemployment Fund for citizens aged from 16 to 70. A negative response will cause war or an atom bomb raid against Warsaw, against which the "Residents of Warsaw", signed below, protest.*

14. The file contains requests and selfless letters about scientific research, written by a retired professor from Gdańsk involved in conducting studies on the verge of physics and electrodynamics, *particularly about lightning and the electrodynamics of the electron: since I would like to initiate a register of lightning striking the Palace of Culture and Science I ask for permission to install on the Palace an insulated spire, from which a concentric cable would be connected with a measurement apparatus on the highest storey of the Palace. A flat next to the observatory would be required due to night shifts and two full time employees.*

A female author of a letter addressed to: **The Palace of the Culture the Indian Sepulchre at the corners of Zielna, Wielka, Złota, Chmielna, and Śliska streets and Jerozolimskie Avenue** (1976) sent a poem to an African tune, a song dedicated to the Warsaw Month:

From Warsaw to Szprotawa
One heart beats about our Warsaw
Lovely Warsaw with its panorama!
Here the picturesque Vistula flows by
And the thirty-storey Palace of Culture stands.
Our symbol and source of joy.

A letter written in 1971 includes a poem about Lenin, with an obstinately recurring refrain:

Although I am a Pole
And precisely for this reason
I worship and love the Great Lenin.

The cited texts and evidence comprise predominantly a positive myth of the Palace of Culture and Science. Up to now, we omitted antithetical moods and experiences linked with the Palace, which create its *sui generis* anti-myth. On the other hand, the el-

ements and contents of the positive myth extracted from the quoted texts do not correspond to antitheses according to the principle of a simple game of binary oppositions. If we were to make a list of values associated with the Palace and belonging to the positive myth, such as power, might, force, duration, luminescence, glow, light, truth, nativeness, harmony, life-giving force, friendship, love, youth, freedom, life, etc., it would be impossible to deduce from it, and arrange according to the principle of contrariness, a suitable anti-list composed exclusively of anti-theses. The same holds true for the anti-myth of the Palace, in which the dominating experience is horror accompanied by specific fascination. Only after taking into consideration both parts of the tradition can we see just how deeply the Palace combined both those inseparable feelings of horror and fascination, characteristic for the primeval experience of the *sacrum*. The Palace may be perceived as a profound unity of contradictions: *coincidentia tremendum et fascinatum*.

The above mentioned "bright" values of the Palace are closely connected with its ideological-propaganda official message and only upon this level is it possible to observe the game played by those simple reverses and antitheses. The beauty of the Palace and its height were contrasted with the ugliness of "old tenement houses" or the ghastliness of capitalist skyscrapers. Owing to insufficient space I shall not delve deeper into this motif, but concentrate only on several synthetic examples. According to the propaganda-ideological interpretation, the construction of the Palace delineated and established a new time, a new epoch, contrasted with the old. Just as Leszek Mech wrote in his poem: *Once, history shared a national/ Gamut of dates stretched across fires/ Or love was stirred in the hearts of those longing for peace by an anaemic saint. / Today, it is not history or winged saints (...) Today, the people proudly / erect for the people (...) a construction of attained friendship.*

The same motif of new times and values offered by the Palace is to be encountered in a poem by Adam Wazyk:

The walls of our architecture
did not belong to us,
palaces bonded by blood,
the work of the poor,
the Gothic of our toil
the Renaissance accomplishment of the people,
the Baroque erected for the lords,
deformed tenement houses
of a merchants' democracy
calculated to last a year,
the house-phantom of the speculator,
an inhuman style
straight from a failed venture,
without heart and beauty.

Now, from the ruins there grows
to become part of socialism,
for day centres and libraries -
our Old Town Gothic,
our Renaissance and Baroque,
our unadorned monument,
a fronton out of lace,
as if just completed by embroiderers,
above them, roof tiles dear to our heart
shine differently...

The construction and growth of the new, socialist Palace were contrasted not only with wartime devastation but also with the downfall produced by capitalism. It has to be kept in mind, Edmund Goldzamt stressed, that:

*The creation of the Palace of Culture and Science started at a time when the nations of Western Europe experienced all the "blessings" of so-called American aid, and when after five years of the Marshal Plan they have already become acquainted with the outcome of such help: the liquidation of entire branches of industry, a further rapid rise of unemployment, a pauperisation of the masses, stagnation and torpor affecting construction, the elimination of the political and economic independence of their countries (cf. E. Goldzamt, *Wieżowce Radzieckie*, Warszawa 1953).*

The socialist Palace connected with "pacific construction", peace, freedom, and life was juxtaposed against capitalism, imperialism, fascism, war, destruction, and death. Summing up these reflections let us turn to another poem by Tadeusz Kubiak, which not only contains this motif but also the probably most apt characteristic of the Palace enhanced with scarce plant hierophanies and allusive references to the symbolic motif of the tree of life in the tradition linked with the Palace:

*It is socialism that builds
despite death and crime.
It is the nation that gives to a nation
and man to man,
what they had won
during that October night.
Like the hardworking gardener
offering his son
fruit grown in the Michurin manner.*

On the side of the anti-myth. A growth..., and I would agree to forget all about Suworov

Embarking upon testimonies and documents comprising the negative myth of the Palace it is simply impossible to omit accounts in the diary of Leopold Tyrmand. On 1 February 1954 this first antagonist and determined oppositionist, an outsider highly sensitive to the rhythm of the social life of Warsaw, recorded:

*Merciless cold weather and people wandering across Warsaw absurdly wrapped against the cold, so that even the shapeliest female resembles a parcel. The sheer martyrdom of waiting for city transport: I suspect that an armed revolt against the regime, if it ever takes place, will start on tram stops in weather such as this. (...) The press drips with lackey tones writing about the "magnificent gift of the Soviet Union for Warsaw". A skyscraper totally useless to anyone. If they had really wanted to send a gift they would have supplied several hundred tramcars. But then their intention is to make an impression and not to offer gifts, and for that particular purpose a skyscraper is just perfect. (*Dziennik* 1954, Warszawa 1989, p. 167).*

The unemotional and architectural interpretation proposed by Tyrmand once again accentuated the fascination and horror merged in the Palace: **Some see in it a Russian fist, others stammer with delight**; the author also registered an attempt at taming (ridiculing) this appalling gift: 13 February. Another exhibition of projects for the town planning and architectural solutions of Stalina Square, the centre of future Warsaw. In the middle: the Palace of Culture and Science - this is its name - a gift from Russia for Warsaw. Some see in it a Russian fist, others stammer with delight. The people have named it "Peking" - which apart from an anagram contains a subtext: this was the name of a large tenement house thus described with scathing contempt in pre-war Warsaw, at the corner of Złota and Żelazna streets, the seat of backstreet brothels. It is easy to guess that from the moment when the construction was announced I was one of its most fervent opponents. As a would-be expert I skilfully criticised its size, anti-Warsaw scale, and bombastic style. But. (...) The Soviet skyscraper with its lofty steel construction would have been passable as a powerful solid which, if it had been left alone and covered with glass, would have been of use and I would agree to forget all about Suworov. When it received a ready-made facing the colour of beige sand I was not pleased, but the facade, colour, and texture looked good and acceptable. Then they started to add: a pseudo-Renaissance helmet tower topped with a spire, confectionary attics and crowning, motifs straight from Kazimierz on the Vistula, and pedestals. **This socialist realistic horror emerged in the very centre of the town** in the manner of a growth on the nose of a drunkard. And now plans are made for a Polish show of socialist realistic imagination surrounding this Russian architectural dissolution (ibid., p. 210).

Hence, even such an unruffled and decisive critic as the author of *Dziennik* and *Zły* experienced ambivalent and competing feelings and doubts produced by the Palace. Despite his categorical opinion: *Where is the nationality of this architecture, why is it supposed to be Polish considering that its elements are at home both in Cadix and Helsinki?* (ibid., p. 215), and despite the deep conviction about the madness of the whole idea:

The leitmotif of socialist realism in architecture – that, which is being built today is supposed to look, for the sake of the wellbeing of man, like something built yesterday, the day before yesterday, and four centuries ago - contains some sort of unconcealed madness (ibid., p. 211) Tyrmand shared qualms whether the Palace might actually become part of the city's tradition:

A town is a culmination. That which ages in it properly ages nicely. After centuries of serving ugly buildings become inevitably beautiful and surrounded with something that we are accustomed to call an ambiance, a climate, a mood, a style; they gather strata of events and experiences, individual and collective, which in time blend the decorations and details of the façade with contents of existence to yield inimitable monuments and symbols. (...) The creation of something new, which is supposed to look old, is doomed to parody and kitsch. (...) Quite possibly, in a hundred years, communist gigantomachy, pathos "close to each man", as they put it, the tawdriness of artificial ornaments, the medley of decorations, and thus nouveau riche and trivial wastefulness will become patinated with time, just like neo-Gothic skyscrapers in fin de siècle Manhattan. We shall have to wait long for this to happen, and, furthermore, the outcome is by no means certain (ibid., p. 212).

The notes in *Dziennik* are accompanied by an image of the Place in *Zły*, in which Tyrmand, contrary to the "new" centre – *Why are a pedestal and gravity to become the emblems and ambiance of Warsaw?* (*Dziennik*, p. 215) – attempted to conduct a remythicisation of urban space in which the largest square in Europe emerges from the chaos of conflagration and the battlefield of the construction site of a new skyscraper. The resultant Palace enlivens and stirs the memory of a city of the past. Since remythicisation is the topic of the above-cited study by Marta Zielińska we shall only note this function of the new and undomesticated Palace evoking the past, as well as yet another ironic name to be placed in its onomastic alongside the already mentioned "tuning fork", i.e. "little finger". *It is simply impossible to walk around this town. The capital is being turned into a quarry. (...) Not to mention that little finger (...) - who needs such large houses?*" (L. Tyrmand, *Zły*, Warszawa 1965, p. 165; cf. M. Zielińska, op. cit.)

Playground of Satan

The Palace of Culture appears occasionally in novels by Stefan Kisielewski (*Przygoda w Warszawie*, *Podróż w czasie* – the cover of the 1989 edition published by Iskry features the Palace together with a red flag affixed to it as if to a mast), but the most complete interpretation is to be found in this author's *Cienie w pieczarze*. Here, the Palace and the surrounding enormous and strange Defilad Square are the meeting place of lovers - the chief protagonist, Roman, who remembers the town and the world prior to their anni-

hilation, and Bluzeczka, a representative of an already new epoch - a place where (at the foot of the enormous thirty-storeys tall building) love turned into hatred, and which is compared to a tree: *Each side of this square is different, since it originates from a different epoch of Warsaw; Roman deciphered in this variety history, just like the past of a tree is read from the cross-section of its rings, but for Bluzeczka this interpretation was totally unattainable* (p. 123). Next to this micro-cosmic scale of the Palace inscribed into the love story, alongside the local history of the town, the Palace and the square reflect each other and the micro-history of this stretch of no man's land, where borders, assuming that some sort actually existed, shifted in one way or another, stretched and shrunk as if they were made of rubber. *Neither the West nor the East* (p. 134). Kisielewski, as no one before, embarked upon a historiosophic interpretation of the Palace, seeking a specific logic of Chaos for the indefinite and chaotic moods creating and moulding the character of the site: *It is here that this palace, a mixture of styles, a monster of naïve monumentality and tasteless ornamentality devoid of the instinct of exaggeration, managed to defend itself quite successfully and even attained the significance and rank of a symbol. After all, if all sorts of things took place in this city since 1939, if all the madness and ordinary kinks of the East and the West arranged to meet here, if life became excessively strange and intends to preserve that state and in all respects grew even more embedded in it, then why should a GOD KNOWS WHAT, a symbol of eccentricity so curiously attached to assorted psychic and chronological worlds that it is impossible to express it in brief or long worlds, not dominate in the centre of a sprawling square emptied in all directions* (p. 181).

For Roman the Square surrounding the Palace evokes, to an extent greater than for the protagonists of *Zły*, the memory of a town once crushed, and stirs and produces increasingly profound introspections: *This place, which he, after all, had known for the past fifty years, now spoke to him suddenly because it became the site of his secretive walks with Bluzeczka. (...) It is impossible to deduce when the past or the present spoke to him, or which particular past since there were so many, arranged in strata and gathered vertically and horizontally, because Defilad Square was simultaneously a junk room and a synthesis, the old and the new, a mixture of various sorts of the past and curious proposals formulated by the present. A tangle of traces and ciphers as well as the emptiness of whole districts razed to the ground. A peculiar place, the largest square in Europe and, at the same time, quite underrated!* (p. 177).

Each side of the square was different, and this dissimilarity grew across the decades and contained the curious and unique history of the town (p. 208).

In Kisielewski's historiosophic perspective Warsaw appears to be a special city, an under-appreciated

centre of the world, a genuine centre. It is in this unknown (provincial) Warsaw that *the cruel and the insane dilemmas of the world were always understood more rapidly than the whole world was capable of doing, here Stalin, Hitler, and other great and merciless magi of the world were deciphered ahead of time (...). The Western world never understood that it is here, in Warsaw, that everything is known ahead of time, and thus it never benefitted from this knowledge. Now, this was the scene of a historical comedy of totalitarianism, which the world treated quite seriously thinking that it is some sort of a people's revolution (...). Due to mistakes, one's own or those committed by others, by the world, this was the scene of things that had never transpired elsewhere. After all, contrary to logic, Warsaw resisted all alone, and upon quite a few occasions, the surging tides of the East and the West (a turnstile antemurale!) (...) with a demonstration of silent absence it greeted the parade of the victorious armies of Hitler; here, the largest number of Jews was murdered in history, here, the Germans set up a horribly crowded ghetto for 600 000 residents, here, in the autumn of 1944 a solitary battle was waged along two fronts: political with Russia and face to face with the foolish Germans fighting for their greater defeat, here, after the fall of the Uprising the whole population was driven out, the first such case in world history, and the town was left alone to itself and conflagrations* (p. 209).

The whole square, the streets, and the pavements - wrote Józef Sigalin - all are built on a "tombstone" placed on the foundations of old basements, former houses inhabited by thousands. This is a truth that we, the older generation, cannot forget (J. Sigalin, op. cit., p. 146). The awareness of this truth, however, was shared also by the younger generations. An English-language fanzine issued by a rock group in 1981 and displaying a graphic motif of the Palace declares: they all live in Warsaw, a city of lunatic Surrealism, a dead city, a city-cemetery, a city built anew but never revived.

For the protagonist of *Cienie w pieczarze* the Palace and this strange square, that "sorcerer's retort", in which a frenzied history of art is mixed up with the past and the present, stirred memory and became the reason why in this strange square the old regained its youth and the new disclosed is hopeless barren old age. This is the Palace that chased the world of dreams to the other side of Marszałkowska Street, and this is the Square, which once and for all banished the world of old movie theatres: the "Apollo" and the "Stylowy", those genuine illusion cinemas together with their asylum of international dreams, living side by side in the memory and interior of the protagonist together with images of Mae West, Jean Harlow, Franchot Tone or Gary Cooper, who existed and performed for all, accessible for a paltry fifty or eighty groszy, proof that in their dreams are not controlled or rationed. The Palace adjoins, and merges with, images of unassuming Jewish shops, unkempt

but full of commodities, an likeness of the Russian Orthodox church in Saski Square, and a scene, recalled from childhood, of the latter's demolition, when several score men pulled a cable tied around one of the domes (...) the poor onion-shaped dome - so inadequately installed in its base, which cannot be said about the present-day Marxist temple in Warsaw: sacrosanct and undeconstructable; it will stand and tower over the city for centuries to come. The Palace and the Square are located next to the church of All Souls in Grzybów, which during the Nazi occupation found itself within the closed ghetto, with images of empty gates and basements, where in the courtyards and on wooden stairs there lurks and sleeps the echo of old voices, the breath of murdered and forgotten Jews. The protagonist now sees this strange Square as a "Land of Wandering Love" (just like Spain, which in the imagination of Don Quixote appeared to be a land of knights errant, or rather erring), and with time assumed a new name borrowed from the title of an old film: *A Roundabout of Torment*.

No other book, with the possible exception of *Mala Apokalipsa*, had amassed so many epithets, invectives and derisive words addressed to the Palace. In *Cienie w pieczarze* the Palace of Culture is portrayed as confectionary white, with jagged stalactites of ornaments (...) an artificial growth originating from nowhere, outside life, evolution, development and normalcy, similarly to two meaningless, nonsensical, and pretentious obelisks thrusting in front of the Palace in honour of an unknown victory; an enormously expensive whole, of little use; supposed modernity, or a superfluous miracle; each column of outright elephantine thickness; simply "Russian Greece"; the nightmare of a pastry chef, as it was universally teased in Warsaw; a shiny spire straight out of Leningrad or, in other words, St. Petersburg; pure madness, and in addition free of charge to all, with fountains recalling a feudal folly imitated by the tsars of the North; socialist opium for the masses; a Marxist church of Warsaw; a gigantic piece of ugliness; a soulless Moloch devouring the town and covering half of the sky; a 300 meters-tall town hall, conspicuously devoid of all style; a symbol of a gigantic fracas; intentionally indifferent, whose primitive mixture and enormous lack of contents will continue to cry out for centuries in this largest square in Europe; surrounded with niches featuring sculptures depicting heroic workers (as a certain reactionary said: one really has to be a hero to work here); a Rhodes colossus of our times; a magic edifice raised by magi from the East, between whose glass and thus ostensibly invisible walls the old and the new will continue to hang around for centuries to come. Do those exclamations and strong words not reflect, as in curses, the domain of the *sacrum* and, at the same time, an attempt at profanisation and desacralisation committed so as to tame the terrifying and inexplicable element of *tremendum*, an attempt opposing (and in this way revealing) its demonic might. On the other

extreme, this process of taming encountered derision, a spontaneously flourishing tradition of more or less scornful jokes about the Palace of Culture: "Small but in good taste", "The old Warsaw-Vienna railway station in a state of erection" (cf. Z. Raszewski, *Wstęp do teorii kawału*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 2/1990), "Little Polish architecture", "What is the most beautiful place in Warsaw? – The thirtieth storey of the Palace of Culture. - Why? – Because the Palace of Culture cannot be seen from there". To the strains of the national anthem local jokers sang: *What the alien power has given us, we shall pull down at night*.

At the same time, it is characteristic that in the case of a such a critically inclined author we come across also contrary testimony of positive experiences and even specific beauty veiling the ambivalence of the Palace and the ambiance amassed therein; this is testimony of taming the Palace and its growing enrootment in the city: *It no longer annoys anyone, visitors like it, the panorama from the top storey is magnificent, the ground-floor stately interiors are spatial and comfortable (...). On the upper storeys everything seemed to be misconceived but the ground-floor halls featured representative grandeur and excellent acoustics*. It became apparent that the enormous naivete of the very notion deprives it of all demonic features and renders it possible to make its close acquaintance on a daily basis. Finally, it is here that the protagonists find their asylum: *The Palace was surrounded by idyllic green lanes (...) why should Roman not drink beer at a stand in his favourite windswept and sunwarmed West Side - that, which is part of the landscape cannot be ugly and must discover its concealed beauty*. By means of such a mental operation connecting common sense with imagination Roman removed from Defilad Square that unfortunate palace, whose stairs, balustrades, projections, and colonnade pavilions he pleasantly albeit unselfishly used. In Kisielewski's book we find a confirmation of an already familiar phenomenon, a practice characteristic for numerous Varsovians screwing up their eyes and ignoring the Palace: *How different it looked close-up – the square without the palace remained curiously beautiful (...) a real square and yet altered by efforts of the imagination*. The same phenomenon of ignoring the Palace was scrupulously recorded by the oft-mentioned Marta Zielińska, who noticed that the Palace appears only six times in the works of an author strongly connected with Warsaw, namely, Miron Białoszewski:

(...) In all of Białoszewski's prose the Palace together with the square are present upon six occasions, including three in passing: during a Sun eclipse, while getting into a bus at the square, and in a description of the sky, which assumed an interesting hue exactly on the side of the Palace. The other three times are mere mentions albeit significant. Actually, they contain the whole quintessence of the Palace. We first come across it in a description of a certain Satur-

day in Marszałkowska Street: "(...) The Lord God rests in heaven, the Mother of God dries diapers on the Palace of Culture...". – *At first glance, nothing of importance and yet such copious contents* – Zielińska commented. – *Ordinary white clouds near the spire bring to mind a home, perhaps somewhat largeish but suitable for Our Lady* (M. Zielińska op. cit., p. 126). The other two important images are those of the Palace seen in a dream: *Tadzio flying around the spire with Ania and someone else, and mention of fires breaking out in Warsaw: The Cedet shop, a bridge. What next? The Palace of Culture?*

Once again, the Palace considered against a backdrop of the symbolism of the centre appears in a special way as strong, permanent, and conspicuous - it is difficult to ignore it – but also as an unnoticed and strange centre around which there emerge not Order and Cosmos but Chaos or, more precisely, Order and Cosmos that is Chaos:

Because it constituted, after all, an organic component of the town, that transit Warsaw for red armies on the move between Moscow and Berlin. Here one lives as if on a volcano, in a passage, on the eve; it is simply impossible to exist outside history. Defilad Square was proof – a complex, style-less, periphery opened to four parts of the world, unprotected against the roar of trains and lorries, against menacingly chaotic motion, ostensibly urban but possessing something affiliated with Nature and spontaneous (...). Perhaps the alienness of the square, so vividly accentuated, is the outcome of a chaotic and haphazard process of someone putting things together (or rather no one or a coincidence of "fate", as working-class Warsaw was in the habit of saying), assorted elements of the past and the present, thus becoming a strangely monumental reference point for collective premonitions, hypotheses, and fears about the future? (S. Kisielewski, *Cienie w pieczarze*, p. 221, 223).

Axis Mundi, the Valley of Josaphat, Golgotha

Just as there is no Wyspiański without Wawel Castle so there is no Konwicki without the Palace of Culture, wrote Marta Fik (cf. J. Lerska /M. Fik/, *Bardzo mała apokalipsa*, "Kultura niezależna", April 1990, no. 60, p. 53). *A writer whom the palace hypnotises as if it were a basilisk* – claims another opinion about Tadeusz Konwicki (cf. M. Zielińska, op. cit., p. 126). The Palace of Culture appears in Konwicki's last film: *Lava*, a screen version of Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve*, seen from Konrad's prison cell and behind the Angel (played by Grażyna Szapołowska) walking among a crowd of pedestrians along the main passageway next to the Centrum shopping centre, on the "other" side of Marszałkowska Street.

I am well aware of the fact that in view of the existence of assorted interpretation perspectives proposed by numerous scholars examining the writings of Kon-

wicki, such as Maria Janion, Jan Walc, Tadeusz Lubelski, Marta Zielińska, and Anna Sobolewska, speaking about the Palace of Culture, or about any other motif without an opportunity for a more thorough consideration of its inner-textual references and place within the entire *oeuvre* must result in an incomplete image. Even in the latter, however, and in a restricted approach to the symbolism of the centre, a problem of interest to us, the Palace still displays a multitude of meanings. Among their variability and evolution, observed starting with *Wniebowstąpienie*, *Jak daleko stąd, jak blisko* and *Mala Apokalipsa* to *Rzeka podziemna*, *podziemne ptaki*, the classical structures of the symbolics of the centre come to the fore in the most distinctive and evident fashion. Upon numerous occasions emphasis had been placed on the oneiric or outright magical dimensions and ambiance of Konwicki's writings and simultaneous immersion in concrete daily reality, the author's sensitivity to the concrete and the pulse and rhythm of daily life. Works by the author of *Sennik współczesny* are a combination of several currents and dimensions: absolute realism, oneirism, and magical qualities, and this is the reason why we may perceive in them an outright reflection and example of Lotman's principle governing the tension between expression and the contents of the symbol, a situation in which *the former belongs to a secular, open and demonstrated sphere of culture, while the latter – to sacral, esoteric and mysterious culture* (cf. Y. Lotman, *Symbol...*, op. cit., p. 152). The secular, profane, mundane existence of realistically depicted contemporaneity, in the case of Konwicki with an extraordinary underpinning of the *sacrum*, does not lose any of its cosmic and sacral dimensions. The same holds true for the Palace of Culture. The mentioned duality, so frequently recorded by the interpreters and exegetes of Konwicki, is still decisive for difficulties with the "classification" of his works. The author frequently complained about their reduction to a purely political dimension: *One cannot look at literature exclusively through a prism of the poetical here and now. I am of the opinion that in my books it is possible to come across more permanent and universal strata* (cf. M. Fik, op. cit., p. 53; cf. also Stanisław Nowicki, *Pół wieku czyśćca. Rozmowy z Tadeuszem Konwickim*, London 1986). On the other hand, Konwicki kept a distance towards attempts at enclosing his writings within the "magical realism" formula. [*This brings to my mind Marquez and South America, which I do not understand, cannot bear, and find totally foreign. I am a "Catholic Protestant" for whom all is true and palpable* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 101)].

This is why while observing the presence of the structures of the symbolics of the centre we should always keep in mind the character of this literature with its Janus-like face, evading all classification. At the same time, we have to remember the original testimo-

ny of its time, evidence of the contemporaneity contained in Konwicki's works (I have in mind the already mentioned titles, spanning from *Wniebowstąpienie* to *Rzeka podziemna*) that could be described analogously to rejected "magical realism" as some sort of specific realism – **HyperPRLrealism** (PRL = People's Poland), or more precisely, and not merely for the sake of easier pronunciation but also to capture the meaning of the described reality of People's Poland – **HyperPRLSurrealism**.

In all those works the Palace appears surrounded with an aura of festivity, an unusual time, a time of special tension, a time with eschatological dimension and ambiance, which for all the protagonists is simultaneously a time-rite of passage. In *Wniebowstąpienie* it is a desacralized holiday (the official harvest festivity) and a time of unrest caused by a new world crisis: *The shops were emptied of all commodities already by noon, the army is in a state of battle readiness – something is in the air, perhaps they had already dropped the atom sausage, the town is full of pageants of "faux peasants" dressed in folk costumes: A huge group of Cracovians and Kaszubians poured down the main avenue to the accompaniment of the hoarse glissandos of an accordion. Many had the pale, bloated faces of city dwellers-civil servants. I was somewhat surprised that they were not ashamed of this masquerade* (T. Konwicki, *Wniebowstąpienie*, Warszawa 1967, p. 13, further on: pages from this edition). The main protagonist awakens under a bridge with a bleeding puncture in his head and suffering from amnesia; he cannot recall even his name and later his accidentally newly met friends call him Charon. The first thing he sees is *two inhabitants of Kurpie or Fishermen spitting across a rusty balustrade into the river*. The Palace of Culture is an orientation point, a place where the protagonist has a date with an unfamiliar girl dressed up as a native of Łowicz-Opoczno; the whole plot takes place around the Palace, which is almost the lead protagonist of the novel. In *Wniebowstąpienie* (whose title is literally evoked by its German translation: *Auf der Spitze des Kulturpalastes*) the Palace of Culture is a central point, the axis and centre of the world, making possible a passage and a transition between three levels of reality: the underworld, the Earth, and Heaven. *Above them hung a constellation of blood-red lights from the palace tower. Higher, there were only stars, a void of sparklers, the glimmer of an unknown, eternal campsite* (p. 54). The "pyramid" towering over the city or the "red Christmas tree of the Palace of Culture" seen from afar in the manner of a cosmic tree is an axis encircled by ghosts and the dead. The author complained that apart from the political tissue *no one seemed to notice that the plot takes place amidst the dead* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 101). Here, next to the axis, in this centre of the world, there is a passageway and an entrance to the innermost recesses of a subter-

ranean inferno. Here begins a voyage to Hell undertaken by protagonists with an unclear ontological status (ghouls, ghosts, and vampires, like the lead protagonist with his numerous life histories, a potential writer feeding on the blood of someone else's life and sucking out of reality as much as he possibly can): *Behind us the terrible trembling of the walls increased and resembled an earthquake. Mr Lilek tugged at something that resounded like a cast iron cover of a tomb. We set off into stifling darkness...* (p. 40). The entrance to those subterranean labyrinths of the Palace resembles a sepulchral niche in monastic crypts. The journey to the netherworld, the land of death, the descent into the underworld, and the ascent to heaven along the vertical axis of the Palace of Culture are accompanied by wanderings undertaken by the protagonists along the horizontal level of the town and the afore-mentioned East-West axis, a plunge into the inferno of the shady joints of Warsaw, a trip to the other bank of the Vistula along the following route: the Poniatowski Bridge - the St. Vincent cemetery in the Bródno district - the two-level bridge - back via Krakowskie Przedmieście Street to the Palace of Culture, accompanied by a vigil next to the coffin of a deceased man, a stay in a speakeasy, and a night spent at a militia station. The motif of the labyrinth expanded by Konwicki in *Wniebowstąpienie* is closely intertwined with the All Souls' Day and sepulchral motif. Descending into the Palace basement and making his way in the darkness, the protagonist seeks support and stretches out his hand to touch the wall: *It's a waste of time - he said. - We're walking inside a long pipe. - What sort of a pipe? - God knows, even those who built it had no idea. You know, Misiu, how it is. Some guys dug a ditch, others brought the building material, still others poured the concrete and covered it with soil, while the designer vanished somewhere, like a stone cast into water, in other words, like a true individual among the collective masses. Only the deceased probably knew something. - What deceased? In the enormous silence something resounded in the distance, resembling bells stifled by a strong wind. - You know, Joseph Vissarionovich. This is a passageway from his times. Everyone already forgot about it because this detail is absent on city maps* (p. 40). Konwicki introduced into *Wniebowstąpienie* a motif (subsequently expanded in *Mała Apokalipsa* and *Rzeka podziemna*) kept alive in the folklore and tradition of post-war Warsaw and relating to underground corridors and passages between the Party Central Committee and the Palace of Culture, a system of nuclear bomb shelters. Just how deeply was this motif embedded in reality and not merely a theme of the folklore tradition of legends and stories belonging to the backdrop of the symbolism of the centre of the world was evidenced by the dramatic events of the Romanian '89 revolution, disclosing a whole subterranean town in the centre of Bucharest.

In Poland too, the presence of underground interiors under the Government Stand in Defilad Square was not mentioned until after 1989, when it was proposed to open there an underground café; up to that time it was a strict secret kept by censorship. *I'll interrupt you because I want to say - confessed the writer - that my tragedy consists of the fact that I am simply a realist. After the publication of Mała Apokalipsa for eight months the route from café "Melodia" (before: "Paradis") to the Central Committee was out of bounds. Everything was dug up. When Wniebowstąpienie appeared I received a phone call from someone who I suspect worked for the security service, pretending to be a Polish philologist wanting to know whether I possessed a plan of the underground part of the Palace of Culture. In other words, my emotionalism contains some sort of a rational core. (...) There is something real and genuine in what I write. I describe Warsaw the way it really looks like. This is a town of dead-end streets, a town-cripple full of dumps, passageways, and dens teeming with drunks and drug addicts. Below my house there is a fifteen-storey bomb shelter. And you tell me that this is an abstract vision of a labyrinth* (cf. S. Nowicki, op. cit., p. 142). The protagonists making their way in the dark subterranean interiors of the Palace finally reach a sanctuary *cum* junk room from an epoch described in Tyrmand's diaries and rapidly becoming part of a past doomed to oblivion: *We found ourselves in an interior as high as a church and windowless. Old ladders, buckets, broken banners, some sort of fabric stretched on frames facing the wall. Lilek opened a white door and I saw an enormous, magnificent toilet. (...) Full of sophisticated columns and almost Baroque stucco, it was neglected and on the washbasin I noticed a thick layer of black dust* (p. 41). In the closing sequence of *Wniebowstąpienie* the protagonist, in the wake of all his adventures and mishaps, after working in a cold storage room resembling a morgue where he carried enormous slabs of meat; after a visit to a church while holding a parcel full of animal hearts received as payment for his work; after an almost ritual purifying bath in the fountain in front of the Palace, takes the elevator just before the break of dawn and rides to the top storey where all the ghosts, phantoms, and the dead encountered that night had already gathered. Once again, the Palace discloses its concealed, indistinct, and sacral nature and ambiance: *Misiu, you're departing through purgatory. Tomorrow you'll see God... I don't know why I went to the hall where enormous figures made of stone stood (...) Three brightly lit lifts invited me in the manner of cathedral confession stalls* (p. 233, 235). The space stretching around this cosmic axis of the Palace, that murky centre of the world, that aged obelisk damaged by the passage of time - *featuring blackened brass names of distant capitals, with many letters missing; only the numbers of kilometres separating us from those towns were untouched; the collectors honoured the brass num-*

bers – is the site of final accounts and Judgement Day. The Palace resembled the Valley of Josaphat. A curious light, extremely dense and amber-coloured, illuminated the Palace pedestal.

The structure of the Palace outlined in *Wniebowstąpienie* and envisaged as the centre of the world, was developed in successive Konwicki stories and close-ups. The Palace changes, its portrayal is dynamic, but the basic core of the structure remains invariable. An amazing construction, a source of multiple associations, Charon, ghosts seeking a passage to the other side: *We have to go back. – Go back where? – What do you mean: where? To return there or there?* Marta Zielińska interpreted the edifice according to the Romantic tradition: *Around it soars a spirit before departure to the unknown, here is the station between this world and the other, a caricature of a chapel of sorts, where the Seer celebrated his rituals. Here, the Palace plays a part totally unforeseen by its builders: a cross between a man-eating monster and a haunted Gothic castle.*

The Palace deciphered by Anna Sobolewska in the light of the initiation rite, that *grotesque axis of the world*, appears to be a place of incomplete initiation into death and suffering, where *transcendence is cheap and full of holes, just like the whole reality of People's Poland. This reality cannot be redeemed in any way* (W. Sobolewska, *Współczesna powieść inicjacyjna: Tadeusz Konwicki, Hugh Walpole, Tarjei Vesas, "Twórczość"* 1991). Even in such an interpretation and reality, *images from this range of the profanum mysteriously touch the sacrum and demonstrate their concealed purification force.* In *Mala Apokalipsa* the crumbling Palace is not only desacralized but cursed by almost all sides, *a statue of pride, a statue of servitude, a stone cake of warning, formerly a source of fear, hatred, and magic horror, a cosmic shed erected vertically, an old outhouse devoured by fungi and mould, forgotten in the middle of a Central European crossroad, a terrifying tumulus, a wilderness, and turns into an artificial altar, a site for self-immolation: I was preceded along this path by Buddhist monks, a certain Czech, some Lithuanians, all on their way to the pyre. I was preceded by people of assorted races and religions walking along this fiery route.* The Palace turns into Golgotha: *I have a terrible urge to tempt fate. So much that I can feel the flesh on my back crawl. And then we shall meet, right? I'll be waiting for you some fifty kilometres directly above the spire of the Palace of Culture, there where our atmosphere, our pleasant earthly existence, comes to an end. But you will not do this, because 2 000 years ago a certain Aramean said to his cruel contemporaries: "Instead of slaughtering a lamb, a neighbour or your brother, make a sacrifice of yourself". I contain seven atoms of the Antichrist but you – at least 77. - He took a brick from my hand and weighed it in his hand. – I shall take this as a souvenir. (...) Perhaps you're hungry, I have two lumps of sugar. – What are you talking about? – I should wipe your*

face with a piece of cloth, but I don't have one. – Was this the last station of our passion? – Yes, we're facing the sacrificial altar. - He pointed to the iconostasis of the palace reaching the sky and white in the snow flurry.

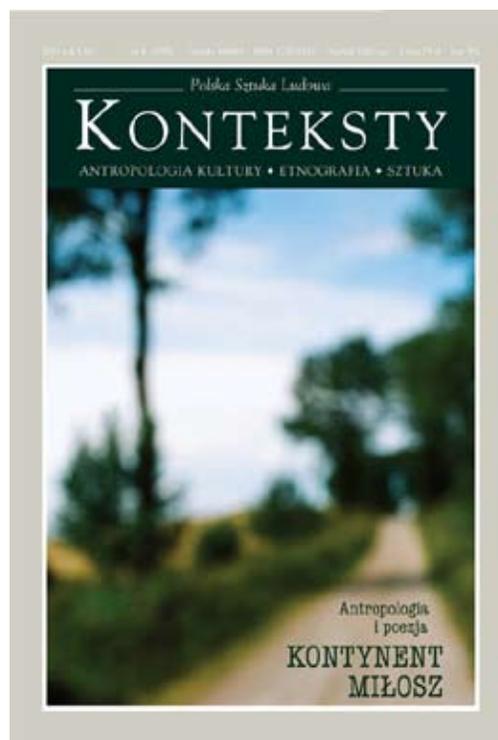
In *Rzeka podziemna* the image of the Palace-Golgotha appears briefly before the suicide committed by Siódmy with the assistance of natural death:

The great Square opened up before him. In the centre stood that famous Palace, a souvenir of Joseph Vissarionovich. It stood immersed almost halfway in clouds or actually in a single huge cloud... Siódmy suddenly experienced absurd relief. This enormous amount of air, free space, the grey sky, which before evening will split above the horizon showing a red glow, and those black jagged clouds halted in their wild rush, the same as those that appeared above the horizon when Christ was crucified.

Endnotes

- ¹ Owing to insufficient space I have not included a complete bibliography, which I managed to establish in the course of surveys, and present bibliographic information about used sources in the text. I would like to express my thanks to Ms Hanna Szczubelek, who rendered available material in the Administrative Head Office of the Palace of Culture and Science and made it possible to for me to work for several days in her office. Using the Chronicle I was able to reach in the course of further surveys less known sources (cf. n. 22).
- ² Mention is due predominantly to the film by Tadeusz Konwicki: *How Far Away, How Near*. The Palace also appears in this director's *Lava* and plays a considerable part in *Grand Picnic*, directed by Krzysztof Rogulski (cf. Bożena Sycówna, *Raj odnaleziony*, (in:) *Film i kontekst*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 55-83); cf also: *Labirynth*, a film directed by Andrzej S. Kałuszko ("Filmowy Serwis Prasowy" 1-31 December 1988); the film by Piotr Łazarkiewicz: *Soc*, shot on the margin of an exhibition of socialist realistic art, contains a special effects scene showing the Palace of Culture being blown up. *Great joy for the eyes*, wrote Tadeusz Szyma (cf. "Tygodnik Powszechny" no. 22, 28 May 1989).
- ³ Cf. sprayed-on graffiti showing a foot wearing a large "punk-style" shoe and kicking the Palace of Culture, which I saw on the wall of the "Iluzjon" cinema in October 1990, and which was used as an emblem and graphic motif in the fanzine of the "Brygada Kryzys" band, no. 0, Warsaw, August 1981 – I owe the latter information to Ryszard Ciarka.
- ⁴ Cf. *Dom we współczesnej Polsce. Szkice*, ed. Andrzej Siciński and Piotr Łukasiewicz (in print) - the outcome of a years-long research programme and a conversatorium conducted by the authors in the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences (IFIS PAN); the publication contains, i.a. Andrzej Siciński, *O idei domu i jego roli w Polsce*; Anna Zadrożyńska, *Ludzie / przestrzeń domowa. Przyczynek do antropologii schronienia*; Jan Prokop, *Dom polski*; Piotr Łukasiewicz, *Dom jako społeczne minimum. Spojrzenie na okres okupacji niemieckiej w Polsce*; Michał Boni, *Funkcje życia domowo-rodzinnego w doktrynie komunistów polskich (1945-1950)*; Danuta Markowska, *Dom - twierdza tożsa-*

- mości; cf. material from the I international conference: "Home: Its Contemporary Material, Social and Value Aspects", Zaborów, Poland, 11-13 October 1990, organised by A. Siciński and P. Łukasiewicz, in the Department of Lifestyle Studies IFiS PAN.
- 5 Witold Rybczyński, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Viking Penguin Inc., New York 1986.
 - 6 Initially, Rybczyński intended to build only a shed for a boat, but then in order to be able to spend the night there it was necessary to make some sort of sleeping arrangement, add a kitchen, a work room, etc. and in this way instead of a hangar he erected a home; this process of a gradual construction of a home became the source of meditation, reflection, and subsequently studies on the idea of the home.
 - 7 Clifford Geertz, *Być tam, pisać tu*, "Ameryka", winter 1989, p. 60.
 - 8 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography. Literature and Art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1988.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, p. 9, 13-14.
 - 10 Jadwiga Siemaszko, Barbara Fatyga, *Po co jechać na Trobriandy*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1989, no. 3, pp. 177-181.
 - 11 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
 - 12 Jacek Ołędzki, „Skuš baba na dziada”. *Przyczynek do powinności przemyśleń perypatetycznych*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1987, no. 1-4, pp. 142-149.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
 - 14 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
 - 15 On this differentiation, derived from Dilthey, between comprehension and explanation cf. James Clifford, *op. cit.*, p. 22, 36 sqq., where the author, accepting the general stand claiming that ethnography is an art of interpretation, an interpretation process and not an explanation, presented the pertinent discussion conducted in contemporary anthropology; cf. also on this differentiation: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Sacred and Profane Beauty. The Holy in Art*, London 1963, pp. 5-6; idem, *Fenomenologia religii*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 717-719; cf. comments by Y. Lotman about the symbolising and desymbolising reading of texts: the former makes it possible to read texts or their particles as symbols, which in their natural context were not intended for this sort of reception. The latter transforms symbols into commonplace *communiqués*; Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, p. 152.
 - 16 Stanisław Cichowicz, *Skąd ten kanon?*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1990, no. 1, p. 50.
 - 17 Cf. M. Eliade, *Doświadczenie Labiryntu*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3.
 - 18 Cf. M. Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia*. Warszawa 1970; idem, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 361-379.
 - 19 M. Eliade, *Sacrum...*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
 - 20 On the polysemantic and multi-dimensional nature of the symbol cf. "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3; here, an extensive bibliography.
 - 21 Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 151-154.
 - 22 Apart from a source survey I made use of the Palace Chronicle arranged by Ms Hanna Szczubełek and a collection of untypical correspondence and poems, comprising an appendix to the Chronicle; not in all cases was it possible to establish the place of the publication of particular texts. The absence of more exact bibliographical data denotes that the given text originates from the above collections.
- 23 Clifford Geertz, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
 - 24 The situation is rendered even more complicated by a philosophical statement made by the former Prime Minister of People's Poland at a reception held at the "Holiday Inn" upon the occasion of a promotion of a book written by the former First Secretary of the Polish United Worker's Party Edward Gierek. The quotation comes from Polish TV: "Sometimes reality becomes fiction, and fiction – reality".
 - 25 This and subsequent emphasis - Z. B.
 - 26 On the symbolic of *axis mundi* cf. M. Eliade, *Brancusi i mitologia*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 181-182.
 - 27 This comparison reflects Rudnev's European stance and greater sensitivity in contrast to the remaining members of the Soviet team: *...These people were in the West for the first time! Only old Rudnev had been in his youth in Warsaw in 1913. He recalled this fact* (cf. J. Sigalin, *Warszawa...*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 428).
 - 28 Marta Zielińska, *Największy Plac w Europie*, "Kronika Warszawy", no. 4/1989.
 - 29 On the significance of this film in the cinematic *oeuvre* of T. Konwicki and a more detailed analysis against the background of the motif of the home in the Polish cinema cf. Z. Benedyktowicz, *Przestrzenie Pamięci*, in: *Film i kontekst*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 151-203.
 - 30 Cf. scenario of *How Far Away, How Near*, in: T. Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata. Scenariusze filmowe*. Warszawa 1973: *I do not know why I remembered this for the first time in my life, the memory of a person carried to Hell. Now I think that he could have been slowly ascending to Heaven*.
 - 31 T. Konwicki, *Ostatni...*, *op. cit.*, p. 250.
 - 32 During my survey I did not come across this note and thus cite it after: Mariusz Szczygieł, *Kochany Palacu*, "Na Przełaj", 10 September 1989.



The Beauty of Human Error

In Memoriam Professor

Aleksander Jackiewicz

Act I. The Eiffel Tower

The Eiffel Tower was erected upon the occasion of the World Exhibition in 1889 and conceived as the attraction and embellishment of the event. Its author, as the name indicates, was engineer Gustave Eiffel, earlier known as the builder of a viaduct over the Sioule (1869), a bridge in Porto (1876), and, predominantly, the 122 metre-tall Garabit Viaduct (1878), a technological miracle of its time. The tower brought him not only immortal renown but also the Legion of Honour, which Eiffel received on inauguration day (31 March 1889) from Minister of Trade Trade Édouard Lockroy (in place of Prime Minister Pierre Emmanuel Tirard, who became short of breath and could not reach the uppermost platform; lifts were installed several weeks later). The Tower is 301 meters high and weighs 9 699 tons.

“This tower is the fulfilment of an eternal dream...” - Prime Minister Tirard said without undue exaggeration in his inauguration speech. Designs for soaring constructions “befitting the capital of the world” had been presented already to Charles VII, Francis I, Henry IV, Louis XV and Napoleon... Almost at the last moment the realisation of Alfred Picard’s monumental project was hampered by the July Revolution. To the end of 1886 Eiffel’s rival was Jules Bourdais, supporter of a cylindrical tower, also 300 meters tall and topped with a hundred powerful floodlights that would *illuminate evenly not only Paris but also the whole of Bois Boulogne, Neuilly and Levallois, all the way to the Seine. Taking into consideration the height of our houses, wrote a malicious journalist, standing like cliffs along narrow canyons, and the fact that the streets of Paris do not radiate concentrically from the site intended for this monstrous column one may presume that the city roofs alone would become flooded with light; hence, probably contrary to the intentions of the authors, only our cats will benefit while pedestrians will continue breaking their legs in the darkness.*¹

Despite “eternal dreams” the ultimate decision to embark upon building a “steel construction accord-

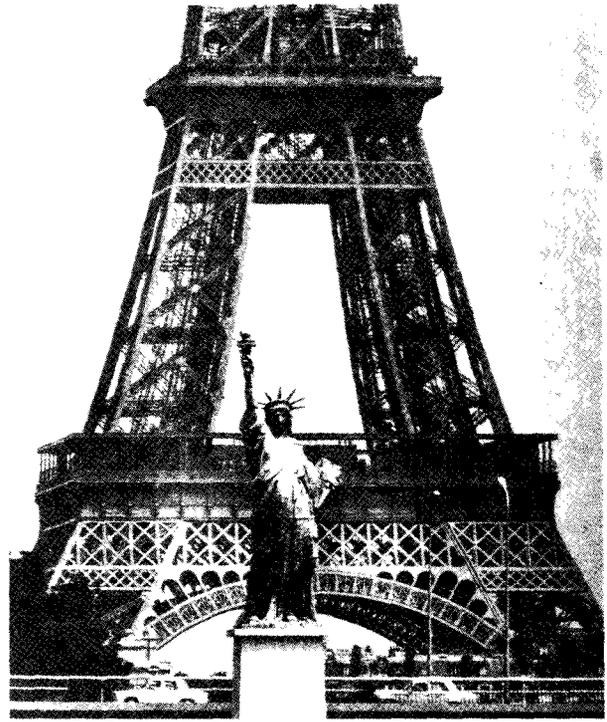
ing to calculations made by engineer Gustave Eiffel”, signed on 8 January 1887 by Eduard Lockroy and the prefect of Paris Eugène Poubelle (yes! – the one responsible for dustbins), produced a storm of solemn protests.

On 14 February “Le Temps” published an open letter addressed to Adolphe Alphand, chief architect of Paris. The signatories included, i.a. Guy de Maupassant, Alexandre Dumas, Sully Prudhomme, poets: François Coppée, Leconte de Lisle, painters: Jean Louis Meissonier, Leon Bonnat, William-Adolphe Bouguerau, Adolphe Willette, architects headed by the designer of the Paris Opera Charles Garnier, musicians, with Charles Gounod, and actors, including Victorien Sardou...: Citizen and dear countryman! *We, the writers, painters, sculptors, architects and amateurs devoted to the beauty of Paris that had remained intact until now, come to protest with all our might and indignation, in the name of the unrecognised French taste, French art, and French history that now find themselves threatened – we protest the construction, on the very earth of our capital, the useless and monstrous Eiffel Tower that public spite, often imbued with good sense and a spirit of justice, has already christened the Tower of Babel. Without succumbing to chauvinistic exaggeration we may boldly state that Paris is undoubtedly the most beautiful city in the world. Along its streets, wide boulevards, enchanting riverbanks and promenades there tower the most magnificent works of mankind. The spirit of France, the author of those masterpieces, delights in this flourishing of stone dignity. The Italians, the Germans, and the Dutch, albeit correctly proud of their artistic heritage, do not possess anything comparable with ours, and thus Paris stirs curiosity and admiration in all corners of the world. Are we to desecrate all this? Is Paris to subject itself to the tradesman’s mentality of a machine constructor by losing its beauty and honour? Yes! – This tower, which even commercialised America would not want, is unquestionably an insult to the town. Everyone feels this, all repeat this, all are anxious; we are merely a weak echo of a rightly disturbed public opinion. Foreigners arriving at our exhibition will cry out in surprise: “This is the monstrosity chosen by the French to give witness to their taste!?”.* Mercilessly jeering, they will be right. Paris of the lofty Gothic, Paris of Jean Goujon, Pilon, Puget, Rude, de Barye, etc. ... will become Paris of Mr. Eiffel. In order to understand the legitimacy of our outrage it suffices to imagine this ridiculous Tower ruling over Paris in the manner of a pillar of black factory smoke and smothering with its barbaric weight Notre-Dame, Saint-Chapelle, Tour Saint-Jacques, the Louvre, the Dôme des Invalides, L’Arc de Triomphe ... All our monuments humiliated and belittled, vanishing in this mad dream. For twenty long years² we shall be forced to watch how the shadow of an atrocious column

made of twisted tin will fall upon this city, trembling with the troubled genius of past centuries. – We turn to you, Sir, who loves Paris so much, who has granted it so much beauty, who has protected it so many times against the devastation and vandalism of industry, and who has the honour to shield it once again. We turn to you, Sir, while guarding the cause of Paris because we know that as an artist who loves all that is beautiful, great and just, you will devote all your energy and eloquence. And if our call will remain unheeded, if our arguments will be rejected, if Paris will insist to be defiled, then let us, the signatories, and you, Sir, at least leave for posterity this protest, which does us honour.³

The signatories did not have to wait long for a riposte: the Tower is not a useless object – Lockroy replied, nor is it an ordinary attraction at the World Exhibition; on the contrary, it provides science with invaluable services. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé stated that the Tower is the immortal victory of masonic lodges over degenerate clericals, a blow dealt against parochial mystifications, revenge for the defeat of the freemasons of Senaar, and an embodiment of the omnipotence of science raising the tower of Babel, an edifice forbidden by the Biblical God.⁴ Magnificent proof of the industrial power of our land; a monument of secular genius; an extraordinary flight of secular thought ... – added others, and Gaston Tissandier concluded that the Tower will symbolise not only the skills of contemporary engineering, but the whole age of Science and Industry, in which we live; it will become a monument of gratitude for the heroes of scientific renaissance at the end of the eighteenth century and the Revolution of 1789, who delineated the paths of progress.⁵

As the construction work advanced and the Tower grew, the opinions of its supporters became louder and more exalted. The above cited de Vogüé, speaking in the name of the Eiffel Tower, addressed the bell towers of the Notre-Dame cathedral: *You old abandoned towers, which no one obeys any longer. Do you not see that the poles of the Earth, now turning around my steel axis, have changed? I am the power of the universe brought under control by the genius of calculations. Human thought runs along my members. My forehead is encircled by radiance brought from the sources of light. You were ignorance, and I am Science!*⁶ An anonymous author of *Guide officiel de la Tour Eiffel* echoed his opinion: *Only from here (from the second platform of the Tower – L. S.) it is possible to grasp the great progress of History. Here, Nature and History demonstrate their peak. It is here - on the plain stretching at your feet that the past took place. It is here (on the Tower – L. S.) that the future will become fulfilled. (...) Thanks to its form of a factory chimney the Tower triumphantly guided into Paris industry, of which attempts were made to deprive the city. Soaring proudly, it*



*reminds the heavens about the might of progress, the victory of Science and Industry.*⁷ The praise was crowned with Adolphe David's *Symphonic Poem*, opus 63:

- Engineers and workers arrive at Champ de Mars (lento)
- Beginning of work and the Tower foundations (moderato)
- The clangor of iron (moderato e martellato)
- Ironworkers (allegro et gaiement)
- Turmoil and anxiety among the workers (allegro mouvemente)
- First platform, the Tower grows, the summit is closer (andante cantabile)
- People on the Tower (moderato accelerando e crescendo jusqu'à la fin)
- The French national anthem and flag (lento e grandioso).

It should be added that according to its adherents the localisation of the Eiffel Tower accentuated its symbolic dimension. Up to 1765 Champ de Mars had been covered with vineyards, and then, for the next 15 years, it served as a training area for cadets of the nearby Military Academy. From that time, however, it became renowned for numerous spectacular events:

1783 – the Robert brothers launched a huge balloon (which fell in Gonesse, near Ecouen, causing panic among the local peasants),

1794 – the Blanchard balloon,

14 July 1790 – Fête de la Fédération under Talleyrand. In pouring rain more than 300 000 Parisians swore an oath of loyalty to the Nation and the Constitution,

10 November 1794 - the execution of Jean Baillic, astronomer and mer of Paris (the same who responded to a comment made by the hangman, who noticed that he was shivering with fear: *Oui, mais c'est seulement de froid* (Yes, but it is only the cold).

8 June 1794 – Apotheosis, the Festival of the Supreme Being, organized by Robespierre,

10 November 1804 - Napoleon presented the Legions with eagles,

1863 – the launch of “Le Geant”, a two-storey balloon built by A. Nadar,

1867 – International Exhibition,

1878 – World Exhibition.

The construction of the Tower lasted 26 months (795 days, to be precise). The Parisian press reported about the course of the work with growing enthusiasm: *The workers compete zealously, full of admiration for the common task. They do not fear exhaustion or inclement weather: be it winter or the hottest summer days they labour with total devotion, courage and an undeterred will to successfully complete the Tower - wrote “Le cri du peuple” in June 1887. “Le Rappel” added on 13 August: The number of curious onlookers watching the construction continues to grow. Foreigners passing through Paris return from the site of the great undertaking delighted and slightly jealous. (...) All agree that the Tower appears to be growing by itself.*

Finally, on 1 April 1889, after all the speeches, celebrations, orders, and ribbons tourists mounted the Tower. The guest book placed next to the entrance to the stairs makes it possible to learn about their first impressions⁸. *What summit will the genius of the French reach in 1989? – The clouds will tell!* (a visitor from Brazil); *Oh Egypt, my beloved homeland, how I would like to see from the peaks of the pyramids a work as mighty and magnificent as the Eiffel Tower, erected with the hands of your children!*; *Oh my native land! When will you achieve such a success?* (a Hungarian); *French genius, you will always be foremost in the world!*; *Seeing the Eiffel Tower I am proud to be French; Just as on the Tower of Babel here too a great mixture of languages but it does not divide people – on the contrary, it unites in a unanimous adoration of France* (a Greek woman); *I discovered on the Tower the expanse of my native seas* (a Breton). Only a certain Bloumette expressed some distance: *The more I admire the Eiffel Tower the more I experience the infinitesimal nature of high heels*; a sergeant of the 18th infantry regiment preceded Freudian interpretations and wrote succinctly and concisely: *An imposing penis!*. The sole sceptical and embittered reaction of the day was the one (is this not an additional symbol?) of our kinsman from the land on the Vistula: *We build ever higher, we fall ever lower. Stanislas Skarżyński*. Fortunately, his voice was drowned in the general clamour.

The opponents proposed aesthetic arguments against the Tower, which they regarded as “mon-

strous”, “hideous”, “ridiculous”, “horrible”, “made not of stone” but of “tin twisted with screws”; it “smothers the town’s monuments with its barbaric weight” and is the reason why “Gothic Paris will become the Paris of Mr. Eiffel”, etc. Ethical arguments proclaimed: “the Tower is a profanity”, “it robs of all honour”, “it humiliates”, is “an insult” and “a new Tower of Babel”, while utilitarian arguments added: “it is useless” and, finally, socio-ideological ones claimed that the Tower was created by the “tradesman’s mentality of a machine constructor”, “even commercialised America would not want it”, it is an “industrial product”...

Counter-arguments include: “victory over the clergy”, “parochial mystifications”, “ignorance” and the “past”; a triumph of “iron”, “industry”, “science”, “free thought”, “secular genius”, the “future”, the “tradition of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution”, “usefulness”, and, finally, a pathos-suffused admission: “Yes, this is the new Tower of Babel”.

It is easy to notice that the symmetric arguments and counter-arguments seem to be arranged in two opposition cycles:

1 – industry: art; engineer: artist; iron: stone,

2 – the future: the past; science: religion; freedom: tradition.

Take the first contrast – industry: art.

The French: *l’industrie* (and the Polish: *industrializacja/industrialisation*) is derived from the Latin: *industria*, i.e. collective work, the activity of a closed group of the initiated... Up to the eighteenth century *chevalier d’industrie* signified a felon, a member of a band of thieves. This negative timbre survived all the way to the middle of the nineteenth century suggesting unsuitable, common, and even degrading activity. Art, on the other hand, from the Latin: *ars-tis* (talent) and the Indo-European *aritus/ritus*, refers to a rite, sacral activity, the sacred, an encounter of the individual and the sacred.

Upon the etymological level the distinction into industry and art thus delineated further contrasts:

industry: art

the collective: the individual

the profane: the sacral.

Parallel, the iron: stone opposition, in which iron is a transposed material while stone “was begat without human intervention” places us *vis a vis* a fundamental, structural culture: nature opposition.

Myth - Roland Barthes maintained – *consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the “natural”*. *What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a “matter of course”; under the effect of mythical inversion, the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion, in short the doxa (which is*

the secular figure of the Origin).⁹ The basic function of collective impression thus consists of a permanent transition of the cultural to the natural, the mythical justification and integration of culture. Meanwhile, in the peculiar case of the adherents of the Eiffel Tower we are dealing with an opposite tendency - we reject Nature! We consciously speak in favour of the transposed. We do not want revealed traditions but truths created by us. We are the future! We are the heretics! ... So many dreams of Castorp and Settembrini are to be found here, so many predictions of futurism and Surrealism.

An anthropologist, however, knows, and this is the painful complaint of his (*nomen omen*) profession, that there is no truth or liberty, and that a myth will only replace a previous myth. The myth cherished by the supporters of the Tower was emancipated society without tradition, religion, and the past, progressing towards unruffled freedom just a step away. This is freedom devoid of tedious injunctions and numbing taboos from the past. Industry, iron, science!

Fifty years later, miniature Eiffel towers advertised (and sometimes still do) spots for cosy rendezvous in Portugal, Central America, the Far East, "all the corners of the world". Decorations depicting the Tower are also, in our epoch, an indispensable component of Parisian cabarets, which, like "Folies-Bergère" or "Crazy Horse" consider or offer themselves as truly liberated "in the Parisian spirit". Even in private brothel apartments in St. Denis a small golden model of the Tower is virtually unavoidable.

Once: industry, iron, science; now: nudity, plumes, Chanel... New generations ruthlessly travestied the ideas of the adherents of engineer Eiffel. Did they actually betray the message?

In June 1984 the lesbians of Paris, demanding the right to legal marriage, carried at the head of their procession a cardboard Eiffel Tower, and in the back a banner: "May secular thought win" The Sun emerged from behind the clouds and smiled upon the Tower.

Act II. *L'Art de Triomphe*

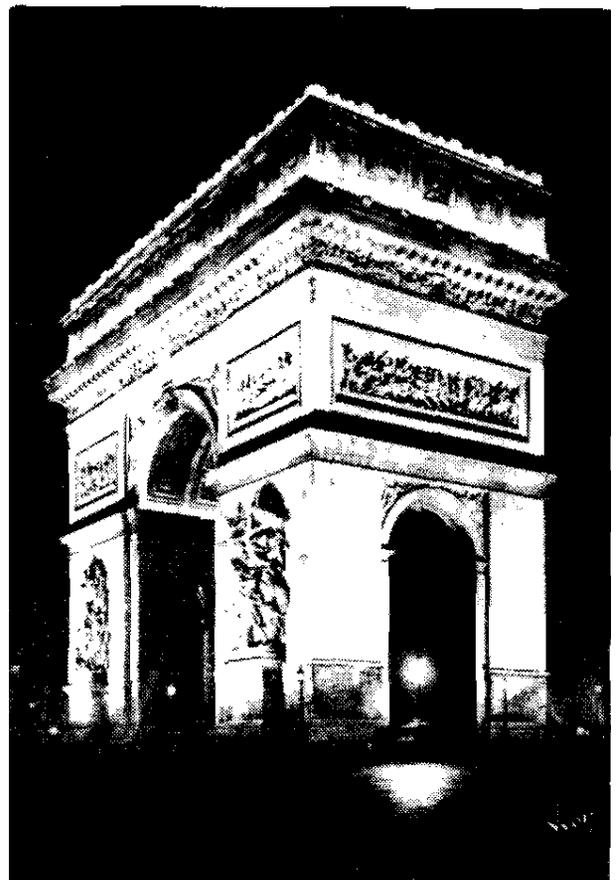
The construction of L'Arc de Triomphe announced by Napoleon on the battlefield at Austerlitz went on for thirty years (15 August 1806 - 29 July 1836). In the meantime, France witnessed the fall of the Empire, the Cossacks entering Paris, the Bourbon Restoration, the Hundred Days, another Restoration, the July Revolution, the onset of the reign of Louis Philippe ...

Originally, the Arc was to stand in the present-day Place de la Bastille, since this was the route along which the army returned from the East along St. Antoine. The project was changed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Baptiste de Nompère de Cham-

pagny, who skilfully suggested to the Emperor that the Arc, soaring over the Étoile tollgate, would be visible from the Tuileries, and thus always before the eyes of the Triumphant Commander; more, His Majesty will ride under it while on his way to Malmaison.¹⁰

The walls of the Arc were 5,40 meters tall when suddenly Jean-François Chalgrin, the author of the design and chief architect, died on 20 January 1811. Work conducted under the supervision of his loyal student Louis-Robert Goust during the tragic days of the fall of the Empire, attained a height of 20 metres. A seven years-long delay now followed. Construction was not renewed until 9 October 1823 upon the basis of an ordinance issued by Louis XVIII but with a new decoration-ideological programme. The Arc was now to laud Bourbon supremacy in the Spanish war. Goust was assigned a political controller - the ultra-royalist architect Jean-Nicholas Huyot, who by systematically questioning all of Chalgrin's drawings ultimately, in February 1830, led to Goust's discharge.

Huyot's triumph was short-lived. Five months later, the July Revolution abolished the Bourbon dynasty. Louis Philippe returned to the original conception of the Arc - a monument commemorating the glorious victories won by the Revolution and the Empire; its realisation was entrusted to Abel Blount, whose name was etched for all eternity at the top of the eastern pillar.



The Arc is 49,5 metres high and 22 metres deep, decorated with sculptures, bas-reliefs, and numerous inscriptions.

1. Sculptures.

- From the Champs-Élysées

on the right pillar: *The Departure of the Volunteers of 1792* by François Rude (a student of Pierre Cordelier); a sculpture today known as *La Marseillaise*, whose name comes from the “genius of war” dominating a group of female figures;

on the left pillar: *Napoleon's Triumph* by Jean Pierre Cortot.

From Neuilly:

two allegories by Antoine Étex: *Resistance* (on the right) and *Peace* (on the left).

2. Bas-reliefs.

- From the Champs-Élysées:

on the right: Death of François Séverin Marceau-Desgravières at Altenkirchen 21 September 1796,

on the left: The Battle of Aboukir (25 July 1799).

Kincei Mustapha surrenders to Bonaparte and Murat.

- From Neuilly:

on the right: General Bonaparte on the bridge at Arcole, 17 November, 1796. In the foreground: Bonaparte and the drummer boy André Etienne;

on the left: Capture of Alexandria by Kléber (2 July 1798).

- From Avenue de Wagram:

Battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805). Napoleon leads the Guards to attack.

- From Avenue Kléber:

Battle of Jemmapes (6 November 1792). Charles Dumouriez begins the cavalry attack. In the background, amongst the staff officers: the recognisable figure of the Count of Chartres – the later King Louis Philippe

3. Inscriptions.

A. 150 names of localities associated with the military successes of the Republic, the Directorate, and the Empire. Looking at a map of present-day Europe we find 35 sites in Italy, 29 in former West Germany, 25 in Spain, ten in France, nine in the former Soviet Union, eight in former East Germany, seven in Belgium, five each in Egypt, Austria and Poland (according to the spelling from the Arc: Pultusk, Ostrolenka, Eylau, Danzig, Breslaw), four in The Netherlands, two in Portugal, and one each in former Czechoslovakia (Austerlitz), Luxembourg (Luxembourg), former Yugoslavia (Montenegro), Switzerland (Zurich), Israel (Jaffa) and Hungary (Raab-Győr).

B. Names of 660 military commanders representing over ten nationalities. Alongside the French they include Germans, Italians, Belgians, the Dutch, the Swiss, Spaniards, seven Poles: Kniaziewicz, Poniatowsky (Poniatowski), Lasowski (Łazowski), Dombrowski (Dąbrowski), Zayonscheck (Zajączek),

Sulkosky (Sulkowski), Klopisky (Chłapowski)... and even commanders from Austria (Scherer), Ireland (Kilmaine), Dominicana (Briux) and Venezuela (Miranda).

From Place de l'Étoile (today: Place Charles de Gaulle-Étoile), crowned with L'Arc de Triomphe, there radiates a dozen (since 1854) wide avenues: Avenue des Champs-Élysée and, counting clockwise, Avenue Marceau (François Marceau-Desgravières, 1769-1796 – revolutionary general, victor from Coblenz and Neuwied, died at Altenkirchen aged 27), Avenue d'Iéna (Napoleon's victory over the Prussian army, 14 October 1806), Avenue Kléber (Jean Baptiste Kléber, 1753-1800 – victor from Fleurus, commander of the Egyptian army, stabbed in Cairo), Avenue Victor Hugo, Avenue Foch, Avenue de la Grande Armée (from 1805 this was the official name of Napoleon's Army), Avenue Carnot (Lazare Carnot, 1753-1823 – leading activist of the French Revolution, member of the Directorate, provisional minister of war serving under Napoleon, later an opponent of Napoleon, during the Hundred Days accepted the post of minister of internal affairs, exiled in 1816, devoted himself to research), Avenue Mac-Mahon (Esme-Patrice Mac-Mahon, 1808-1898 – general, royalist, distinguished during the Crimean War and at Magenta, stifled the Paris Commune, President of France, in 1873-1879), Avenue de Wagram (Napoleon's victory over the Austrians, 4-6 July 1809), Avenue Hoche (Louis Lazare Hoche, 1768-1797 – revolutionary general, cruelly pacified the Vendéans) and Avenue de Friedland (Napoleon's victory over the Russian army, 14 July 1807).

The Arc closes one of the most magnificent vistas of urban planning in the world: Place de l'Étoile - Champs-Élysées – Place de la Concorde with the Luxor Obelisk (thirteenth century B.C.) - the Tuileries Garden - Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel – the Louvre.

In a poem mentioning his father, a general whose name was omitted from L'Arc de Triomphe, ¹¹ Victor Hugo wrote:

*Oh! dans ces jours lointains où l'on n'ose descendre
sur ce bloc triomphal ou revit tout l'empire
ou l'histoire dictait ce qu'il dictait ce qu'il fallait écrire
vous avez oublié sire un nom militaire
celui que je soutiens et que portait mon père*

*c'était un vieux soldat, brave entre les plus braves
dont le sabre jamais ne dormait au fourreau
et que napoléon enviait à moreau
pourtant sur votre mur, il est oublié sire
et vous avez eu tort et je dois vous le dire*

*car le poète pur, de la foule éloigné
qui vous aborde ici de son vers indigné*

*sire! et qui vous souhaite un long règne prospère
n'est-ce pas de ceux qu'on flatte en oubliant leur
père.*

L'Arc de Triomphe was intended to be a monument commemorating the power of the French army, national pride, and the invincible might of the Empire. It served as a point of departure for the funeral corteges of Ferdinand Foch (1926), Joseph Joffre (1931), Philip Leclerc (1947), Jean-Marie Lattre de Tassigny (1952) and the hero of colonial wars - Louis Lyautey (1961). It is here, next to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, established in 1921, that the ceremonial changing of the guard is held. Here runs the obligatory route of all war parades...

The tourists, however, blissfully unaware of the blood-stained pages of military history and visiting colourful Paris distant from the roar of canons and the dust of the battlefields, lift their heads to seek on the Arc the names of native localities or familiar sounding surnames. The English appropriate Clarke, MacDonald, Hatry, and Pierce; the Germans - Kellerman, Struts, Stengel... the Spaniards - Almeras, Miquel, Loverd...; the Portuguese - Cosmao, Dugua...; the Lithuanians - Baltus; and the Czechs (I heard this!) - Zayonscheck... Never mind the fact that those dead are probably rolling over in their graves. In this chaotic mixture of languages the Arc becomes a sign of cosmopolitanism rising above national frontiers, armies, and a gung-ho legacy.

Paradoxically, it is those clueless tourists who are right. From the very onset, albeit independently of the intentions of its authors (naturally, if we recognise them as individuals working on sketches and not the collective genius of history), the Arc was already a symbol of that, which is most alien to the power of armies and the might of empires - a symbol of tolerance and probably the only building in the world from which the revolutionary Dumouriez, Emperor Napoleon, and King Louis Philippe Bourbon look down; this is the starting point of the exits of avenues named after the perpetrator of regicide Carnot and the reactionary monarchist and hangman of the Communards Mac-Mahon, together with Victor Hugo, defender of the latter's right to asylum (a stand for which he was exiled from Belgium), the bloody enemy of religion Hoch and the self-declared supporter of clericalism Foch... . Recall yet another vista from the Arc spanning from the nineteenth century (Champs-Élysée), towards ancient Egypt, the sixteenth century (the Tuileries Garden) and the thirteenth century (the Louvre).... It becomes apparent that Place de l'Étoile is the site of overcoming and eradicating contradictions between epochs, ideologies, and nations. A site for unity, for everyone, a refuge. *Coincidentia oppositorum*.

Even more so considering that the patron of this conciliation of the opposites is the powerful shadow of the One who was the god of war and the little corporal, a monarch and a liberator of nations in the name of the ideals of the revolution, an Italian Corsican and "the greatest Frenchman", a tyrant and the one who: *augured ultimate salvation/ For men's long-exiled liberties* (Pushkin).¹²

Naturally, one could say that these are mere intellectual speculations and theoretical paradoxes. Let us then take a look at the Arc guest book¹³. *What joy to see the gateway to liberty* (a Czech); *Only twice in my lifetime could I experience similar uplifting moments - seeing the Statue of Liberty in New York and the Arch of Triumph in Paris!* (a Moroccan); *Welcome, land of asylum and human rights!* (a Romanian); *France! You are forever the homeland of liberty!* (a tourist from Lyon)... Not by accident do covers of guidebooks and albums showing Paris as a multicultural town, the capital of liberty, feature the Arc de Triomphe, while the night life and frenzy offered by the same town are accompanied by our old familiar friend, the Eiffel Tower.

As long as Ravic from Erich Marie Remarque's *Luk Triumfalny* found in Paris refuge and shelter, the massive grey shape of L'Arc de Triomphe, as if made of liquid silver, towered above¹⁴. When, however, the French police arrested and deported the refugees, and when we know that the ominous time of nationalist hordes and ideologies is returning, the square turned into a sea of darkness, in which even L'Arc de Triomphe vanished.¹⁵

Act III. The Sacré-Coeur Basilica

Vineyards, mills, wooden cottages, a dozen crystal clean fountains, deep caverns - remnants of gypsum mines, the small church of St. Peter, eight cosy streets, and a small square. The fact that Montmartre Hill (from: *mar tray* - execution site) preserved its Arcadian character all the way to the 1870s is a strange caprice of history considering that already Louis XVI wished to erect here a royal necropolis (the project was well advanced), the Directorate - a mausoleum, Napoleon - a Temple of Peace, and Louis XVIII - a monumental column (the subscription was initiated). History too did not spare the hill. In 1814 it was the site of a bivouac of the Russian army (which set fire to half a century) and in 1815 - of the English. In June 1848 the insurgents waged their last bloody battle here, and on 22 May 1871 the famous platoon of woman-Communards, including Liza Michel and Elisabeth Dmitrieff, put up desperate resistance against the first army corps of Versailles led by General Ladmirault¹⁶. But afterwards the vineyards once again flourished, orchards blossomed, and trees forgot all about the past ...

It was precisely illusory longing for bucolic idyll and freedom as well as a much more rational one for

cheaper life that in 1860-1865 inspired a group of young painters, the so-called Manet Company, to settle down on the hill.

Renoir worked in studios in, successively, Tourlaque, Caulaincourt (slightly lower) and Cortot streets; Degas – in Blanche, Lepic and Fontaine streets; Cézanne – in Hégésippe-Moreau; Van Gogh and his brother Theo lived in rue Lepic. Then there was Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Sisley... This group of peers (in 1865 the oldest, Pissarro, was 25 years old, and the youngest, Renoir, was 24) made Montmartre famous across the world. The site of their meetings - Café Guerbois - became the stuff of legends but already when... the artists had long left the hill.

On 24 May 1873 the Adolphe Thiers cabinet was forced to announce its resignation by 362 votes against 342. On the same day, Thiers, whom Polish textbooks depict as a reactionary and the hangman of the Paris Commune, was recognised by the Parliamentary majority as much too soft, liberal, and republican. One of the first steps made by the new monarchist cabinet was to issue a decree (24 July 1873), proposed by the renowned extremists Hubert Rouault de Fleury and Alexandre Legentil about the erection of the Sacré-Cœur basilica on top of Montmartre.

A competition was immediately announced in December of the same year¹⁷, and the design chosen from among 78 projects was the one by the architect Paul Labadie, modelled on the Romanesque-Byzantine church in Saint-Front (Périgueux).

The text of the resolution passed on 24 July 1873 mentions the need to *expiate the crimes of the Commune* and for the Papacy's loss of secular power... . It thus constituted an arrogant demonstration of the clerical conservatism of the new authorities, easily recognised by French society. In a country still partly occupied by the Prussian army (which left Nancy on 5 August 1873, and Conflans and Jarnay in as late as September) the resolution also reflected fierce opposition against the anti-religious Kulturkampf policy consistently conducted by Berlin (14 May 1873 – the enactment of a law against the Jesuits, 14 May 1873 – the dissolution of smaller seminaries and the restriction of the bishops' jurisdiction) and thus, *mutatis mutandis*, featured an anti-German hue. Finally, the choice of the Abadi project contained an easily discernible pro-Russian gesture. Not without reason was the Russian Ambassador Alexander Gorchakov invited to the first display of the model. By referring to the traditions of the East the white domes of the Sacré-Cœur were supposed to evoke Franco-Russian political rapprochement. Unfortunately, an excess of politics usually does not exert a favourable impact on works of art....

Building the Sacré-Cœur basilica took 38 years – from the instalment of the cornerstone on 1 February 1874 to the completion of the bell tower in 1912; even

then, work on the interior had to be continued with an interval during the Great War; ultimately, consecration took place on 16 October 1919 in the presence of nine cardinals, 12 archbishops, and 98 bishops from all over Europe.

All agree - Josette Devin wrote - about the extraordinary ugliness of this building, unfortunately one of the most conspicuous and known in Paris. The war of 1870 thus proved to be just as unfortunate for France as for the beauty of Paris... . Next, however, he added that surprisingly, just as in the ugliness of a beloved face we start to perceive charm and beauty, the Parisians grew used to to Sacré-Cœur and even shower the basilica with sincere affection.¹⁸

In reality, not everyone was compelled to grow accustomed. The church is living proof of French light-heartedness and contempt for the well-worn canons of beauty - the "Times" wrote in October 1919. Just as the Impressionists overcame the aesthetic images of their epoch, so today these white walls accomplish the same on the very same spot... . In an interview given to "Le Figaro" upon the occasion of shooting the film *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937) director Wilhelm Dieterle went even further: *I am not surprised that the Impressionists were so fascinated with the Parisian lightness of this fantastic building in the white afterglow...*

When in about 1907 the walls of Sacré-Cœur were already tall enough to imagine their ultimate shape, Manet (d. 1883), Van Gogh (d. 1890), Sisley (d. 1899), Pissarro (d. 1903), and Cézanne (d. 1906) were no longer among the living. Others had left Montmartre long ago, driven away, as in the case of Monet, by the hubbub of the great construction site. But who cares?

Day and night, steps leading to the basilica are full of colourful throngs of tourists longing for the careless subtlety of Parisian life, wishing to imbibe the legend of the Montmartre of the Impressionists and the Bohème, and taking photographs against the backdrop of the Byzantine gates of the sanctuary. When I asked them, by no means facetiously but simply as a curious anthropologist, what Impressionist work was their favourite, more than 50% answered: Sacré-Cœur. This should not come as a surprise when reading travelogues and looking at the collages featured on postcards or the canvases by thousands of mediocre painters on show in Place du Tertre. The basilica has simply gotten mixed up with the Bohème, and so-called historical facts have once again proved to be non-essential and dissolved – this time - in the fumes of absinthe.

Postscript

The beauty of human error? Or, actually, of three assorted errors: the change of the subject of ideology (the Eiffel Tower), the change of ideology itself (L'Arc

de Triomphe) and, finally, the change of chronological transposition (Sacré-Coeur). These differences, however, are secondary and the essence lies in the dynamic emanated by ostensibly unchanging and static objects. “Ostensibly”, since this is an illusory static quality. The Eiffel Tower was quite different in the positive and optimistic era of Jules Verne than in the passionate and decadent “belle époque”. Similarly, the meaning of the Notre Dame cathedral, *Mona Lisa*, and Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* also changed. An historian of art is supposed to describe an artwork (while an historian – an event) as such or, eventually, against the background of “its”: time, i.e. that for which it was intended.

The anthropologist is interested in an object within the dynamic context of culture, an ever-living mythical object. The beauty of human error – is it not already an error that the Notre Dame cathedral is an “historical monument”, that people “tour” it, that the police regulate traffic in the cathedral naves during Midnight Mass? Is this not a new sign within an equally novel system of values? A new myth? Structural anthropology is charged with “losing the author”, with no longer remembering who was the architect of L’Arc de Triomphe and who painted *Sunflowers*. What a misunderstanding! Structural anthropology does not deal with something that can be found in every lexicon. Instead, by studying the subtle game of meanings and myths it continues to rediscover the authentic author: lost in the labyrinth of history, unaware, but still the untiring genius of social imagery.

Otherwise, all is true: Paris is the city of liberty, lightheartedness, cosmopolitanism, subtlety, frivolous ambiguity. It is also a refuge, the capital of the world and *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Everyone who reclines on the lawn in front of the Eiffel Tower may feel how *Axis Mundi* – the axis of the world - runs across his navel.¹⁹

Endnotes

- ¹ A. Picard, *Tours de 300 metres de hauteur*, “Revue de l’architecture et des travaux publics”, 1885, p. 32.
- ² According to the original project the Tower was to be pulled down after twenty years.
- ³ After: H. Leyrette, *Gustave Eiffel*, Paris 1986, p. 172 and 174.
- ⁴ E. M. de Vogue, *A travers l’Exposition*, “Revue des Deux Mondes”, VII/1889, p. 19.
- ⁵ G. Tissandier, *La Tour*, “Le Figaro” (special edition), 2 April 1889.
- ⁶ E. M. de Vogue, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
- ⁷ *Guide officiel de la Tour Eiffel*, Paris 1987, pp. 5-6.
- ⁸ After: J. P. Spilmont, M. Friedman, *Memoires de la Tour Eiffel*, Paris 1983, pp. 191-193.
- ⁹ R. Barthes, *Changer l’objet lui-même*, “Esprit”, vol. IV/1970, p. 6.
- ¹⁰ H. Dillange, *L’Arc de Triomphe et le Carrousel*, Rennes 1983.

¹¹ V. Hugo, *L’Arc de Triomphe*.

¹² A. S. Pushkin, *Napoleon*, [in:] *Dziela wybrane*, Warszawa 1965, p. 92.

¹³ Visitors’ book at the Arc de Triomphe Museum, available at the Museum - year 1986.

¹⁴ E. M. Remarque, *Łuk Triumfalny*, Warszawa 1973, p. 117 and 370.

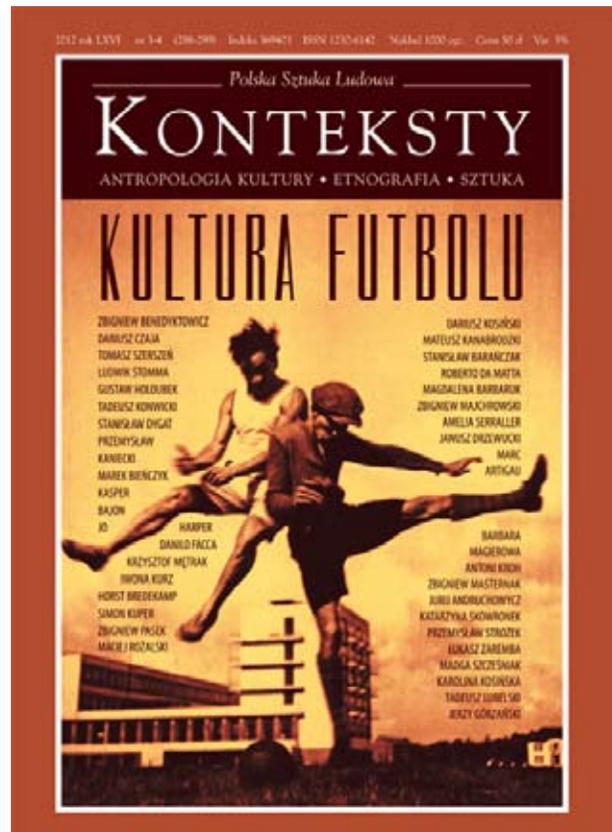
¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

¹⁶ W. Serman, *La Commune de Paris*, Paris 1986, p. 500.

¹⁷ J. Hillairet, *Dictionnaire historique des rues de Paris*, Paris 1980, vol. I, p. 269.

¹⁸ J. Devin, *Paris de toujours*, Paris 1968, p. 149.

¹⁹ Salvador Dali was wrong – the axis of the world (*centre du monde*) is not situated at the train station in Perpignan.



Fragments of the Venetian Discourse

I. Hieroglyph 1.

It was probably Henry James who was one of the first admirers of Venice to distinctly draw attention to the fact that the veritable building material of the town is neither sand, stone nor water but something much more powerful: light, conceived as *materia prima*: *The light here is in fact a mighty magician and, with all respect to Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, the greatest artist of them all. You should see in places the material with which it deals—slimy brick, marble battered and befouled, rags, dirt, decay. Sea and sky seem to meet half-way, to blend their tones into a soft iridescence, a lustrous compound of wave and cloud and a hundred nameless local reflections, and then to fling the clear tissue against every object of vision.*¹

More than a hundred years later, the phenomenal *Watermark* by Brodsky contained a distant reflection of that observation, albeit this time in a more concrete form. Brodsky made an observant remark about the particular variant of Venetian light: *The winter light in this city! It has the extraordinary property of enhancing your eye's power of resolution to the point of microscopic precision [...]. It carries no warmth or energy, having shed them and left them behind somewhere in the universe or in the nearby cumulus. It's particles' only ambition is to reach an object and make it, big or small, visible.*²

What is the light mentioned in those two fragments, how is it comprehended? Quite certainly it is not merely a physical quality. It is no longer ordinary electromagnetic radiation, but possesses the power of extracting things out of non-being. To put it in stronger terms: it has the power to create the world and render it visible. This gesture changes things fundamentally: it takes the conceit of light out of the space of physical description and strict measurable parameters and introduces it into curious space with properties that only partly succumb to rational description.

2.

Each successive Venetian narration carries traces of comments by predecessors and is added *above* or

along other texts about the town, even if not always aware of this fact. The foundation of the discoveries made by Ewa Bieńkowska in her intentionally palimpsest novel: *Co mówią kamienie Wenecji?*³ is Venetian light in its assorted forms and versions. They are thus an open reference but also - and this must be stressed - an original and creative development of the above-cited observations of her predecessors.

Already the fragment opening the book is highly symptomatic: *This person stood in the centre of Piazzetta on a cool but sunny autumn morning, and holding a book looked at the cover and then at the view before him, raising and lowering his head in a regular rhythm, over and over again (...). His facial expression was both astonished and delighted to such a degree of bliss that I could not prevent myself from a gesture of indiscretion. I came close and looked over his shoulder. Obviously...*

This was the cover of a cheap album of works by Guardi, reproducing precisely that, which was situated right in front of us. The slabs of Piazzetta leading towards the water, St. Mark's, the church on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore on the opposite shore, and translucent sky marked with several swift clouds. The veracity of the image bordered on the uncanny, one felt the same chilly air, the same suffusion with light, the glistening quality of the dark colours (as if with an addition of bottle green), the strong vibrating white colour of the church facade, and the surface of the canal, whose smoothness was produced by tiny waves ruffled by the wind. One had the impression of a model, which in some manner rendered the view more accurately than our eyes (...). (CMKW, 7-8)

This thoroughly Venetian genre scene is not concerned solely with measuring the distance between the real and the painted, the reduction of the intensity of the painterly *mimesis*, which in a moment will reveal its illusory character. Here, the heart of the matter is different. Recalling the morning frame from Piazzetta, Bieńkowska openly demonstrated her writer's intention: a wish to discover Venice predominantly in the images created there, to extract and name the Venetian *eidos* manifested in those disturbing objects made of colour and light.

In other words, this is a richly documented book about Venetian painting... or more exactly, about Venetian art and Venice as a work of art. Undoubtedly, the key to the town is painting, the works of Venetians. An undertaking, and this cannot be concealed, that remains highly risky (*If I could describe the Venetian courtesans...* , as in Miłosz's famous reservation about the possibility of depicting the canvas by Carpaccio), since it embroils the narrator of the story into all the problems faced by the ekphrastic statement.⁴ Regardless whether this intention succeeds or not it must be underlined that it is in this particular gesture of abandoning literature for the sake of painting that the originality and force of Bieńkowska's book lies.



Venice, Photo: Joanna Benedyktowicz

Whoever would like to perceive Bieńkowska's publication primarily as a compendium on the history of art would be wrong.⁵ Although it brims with erudite comments bibliographical details, sophisticated descriptions, and interpretations of particular canvases, it remains obvious that this is more than just a guide-book on Venetian art, although one cannot exclude the possibility that this is the way in which it could be perceived. Following the complicated adventures of Venetian painting, delving deeper into the art of Bellini, Giorgione, Tintoretto, and Titian all the way to Guardi and Canaletto, the author revealed for our sake a complicated pattern, still only partly recognised, of spiritual and technical borrowings, affiliations, continuations, and negations occurring between their *oeuvre*. Actually, this feature is not the most relevant. It is merely factographic substance from which one can depart towards an intellectually subtler concept.

Precisely. As I have mentioned, the book by Bieńkowska is usually read "transparently", without understanding that this prose, sometimes with a strong underpinning of style, is not solely a thorough report on library and museum surveys but, first and foremost, a literary construction. And if this is so, then it is not - because it cannot be - conceived without committing a cognitive "sin". In other words: it is an attempt not only at an account but also tries, sometimes in a highly evocative manner, to impose with the assistance of rhetorical operations an image of Venice. Hence my task: to take a look not only at the designates towards which the text steers us but rather at the text itself, the way in which it creates a vision of the town and the linguistic operations with which it fulfils this task. To put it differently: to discover the mythological component contained in the book. This is particularly interesting in view of the fact that many parts of *Co mówią kamienie Wenecji?* possess a distinctly meta-textual nature and the discursiveness revealed therein could suggest that this sort of narration is free of all myths. Unfortunately, this is not so simple. There, where we fall into the trap of the language mythical matter reveals itself with all force whether we know this or not. More: it is worth remembering about a certain recommendation that has all the features of a self-fulfilling prophecy: there where there is Venice there you should search for a myth!

Apparently, the mythical narration present in the book is organised predominantly by two closely connected motifs: the metaphysics of light and the nature of the creative act. The whole erudite and impression-oriented "rest" is based on these two foundations. Let us try to take a closer look at them.

3.

The first question posed by Bieńkowska is totally essential: how did it happen that it was precisely here,

in Venice, at the turn of the fifteenth century, that there emerged painting so dissimilar to all that that was being executed all around, for instance, in the workshops of Tuscany? Were the *Madonnas* by Giambellino, *The Tempest* by Giorgione or *The Pastoral Concert* by Titian conceivable outside Venice? - she asked rhetorically and is clearly inclined towards some sort of a version of geographical-aesthetic determinism. It is Venice, the author added, and its unique light that left such a strong impression on local painters. Venetian space is an inimitable laboratory of light, a place exceptionally suitable for observing its changes and for seeing how it behaves in a confrontation with matter: *Whoever toured Venice or looked at its paintings in foreign museums was aware that something special was taking place as regards the question of perception and the puzzle of the visible nature of the world. Here this feature was exceptional and provoked unique responses. The simplest elements of the world exist in Venice in a manner not encountered elsewhere, granting ordinary activity an additional aura, semi-ceremonial and semi-intimate. Light shines differently across the lagoon, builds space, enfolds things, draws forth and conceals their matter, and endows the latter with scores of guises.* (CMKW, 237)

In this town everyone, whether he wishes to or not, becomes engaged in looking. Here, we all are only a mere addition to the eye, the author echoes the lesson taught by Brodsky. Venice is the sole space in which the eye reveals its autonomy so distinctly, in which it not so much separates itself from the body as totally subjugates the latter: *Venice taught how to look and suggested perception. Each of its seasons and time of the day, each caprice of the weather was a lesson in the manner in which the theatre of the visible is arranged, the manner in which plans and depths are constructed, the way in which they occupy their surfaces and abandon them. It teaches what happens with colours when they are illuminated by the variable glimmer of the lagoon, when they outline the meandering canal or the line of the coastline with its half-moon shape. That what is light becomes doubly reflected from the water and the stone; the degree to which it makes it possible to penetrate the concealed substance of things and the extent to which it maintains us in a state of illusion.* (CMKW, 238)

Here we counter an interesting and creative application of the metaphor of Venice as a theatre. Now, Venetian space will no longer be the patinated, old, and crumbling stage design that it is often perceived (in vain would we add that this is not a compliment!), but will become a living and pulsating panorama transformed into a theatre of perception. An instructive panopticon of the stirring work performed by light, texture, and colour. In other words, an instrument with distinctly positive commutations enriching cognition.

Remarks about the variable and disturbing nature of the visible are developed in another beautiful and

instructive metaphor of the space of Venice possessing the features of a magic telescope whose simplified version is the kaleidoscope. It combines the narrow field of vision and depth evading our gaze, concealed but foreseen in each element of the vision. The slightest movement and tremor of the telescope shift all the components that upon each occasion arrange themselves into a different world, into related micro-cosmoses that, however, vary with every moment. The limited field of vision – the narrow canals, streets, and squares, whose majority are streets slightly expanded to make space for a church - produce the impression that the centre of vision is transferred elsewhere, always further on, and will be reached by walking ahead, by discovering the point of an encounter, the point of an equilibrium, somewhere where the eye can no longer penetrate. Each step causes an alteration, a rearrangement of elements creating an inexhaustible number of configurations; a walk across Venice is tantamount to slowly twisting a kaleidoscope and the transformation of its countless virtual versions into reality. (CMKW, 71-72) This game with the unknown appears to be endless, since each consecutive version shows a successive one. Interestingly, the town planning configuration, narrowed down, stifling, and at times claustrophobic, does not become tedious due to the incessant presence in this restricted space of the elements: the sky and water.

One could outright have the impression that Venice extracted itself from non-being as if specially for the sake of painters. The latter took up this challenge and devoted themselves to studying colour and light. Venetian painters discovered, albeit each in his own manner, an astonishing thing. As if contrary to all sorts of Platonic approaches they recognised that the mystery of reality lies in its skin, its surface appearance. That e v e r y t h i n g is already given to us h e r e, and it is only necessary to be able to see it. It is in Venice that convincing arguments were provided demonstrating that the corporeal is merely a form of the spiritual and that only a thin line divides optics from metaphysics.

For all practical purposes, the entire book by Bieńkowska is an attempt at describing this mysterious and, from the viewpoint of common sense, impossible abutment of opposites.

4.

If it is true that, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty maintained in his pioneering analyses of the phenomenon of perception, painting, in its most profound vocation, is an incessant examination of the mystery of the visible ⁶, then Venetian painting is certainly the most credible confirmation of this declaration. It was in Venice that a discovery was made of the creative force of colour and its fundamental role in the creation of

painterly reality. Painting was revealed as a passionate celebration of the visible.

Take a single instructive example. *The Tempest* by Giorgione, still puzzling and resisting all exegetes, belongs definitely to the canon of Venetian masterpieces. Here is an ekphrase of this famous canvas as proposed by Bieńkowska: *It is impossible to describe The Tempest without succumbing to a paralysing feeling of helplessness. Sometimes, personal recollections can assist us in coming closer to it. The eye first registers a cloudy sky and a snake-like line of lightening against ominous heavens. Lightening is the source of light, it illuminates the walls of the town and the tops of the trees in an abrupt flash, which everyone recognizes from his experiences of summer storms. This flash brings forth the phosphorescent whiteness of the stones and for the single blink of an eye changes leafs into constellations of glistening points, accentuating the dark shadows of trees standing against the light. Before the eye rests on a mysterious Gypsy woman in the lower part of the painting it is attracted by the view of a town as if straight out of a dream. The flash of lightening for a single moment changes not only the appearance of things but also their substance, and leaves us convinced that for a split of a second we took part in a different, ceremonial, and secret existence of the world.*

Only later does out gaze pause at a female figure and even later extracts the figure of a man – his white shirt and dark red jerkin. Both figures are less absorbing than that, which is taking place in the sky and on earth, but we feel that that the painting could not do without them. It is thanks to them that it evades pan-aestheticizing “Romantic” savouring and gains an equilibrium. (CMKW, 46-47)

Not by accident in her description of the canvas the author did not concentrate on a mysterious anecdote, which is the case of so many difficulties for its interpreters, but on the just as puzzling purely colour stratum, sensual and visual, not to say: formal, if it were not for the contemporary, almost exclusively “technical” comprehension of that term. The landscape of *The Tempest* is so extraordinarily rich as regards colour that it reveals in Nature qualities whose existence the “ordinary” eye bypasses and simply does not surmise. Contrary to commonplace habits the painting is not a carbon copy of reality but its creative construction, created in an alliance of the eye, the imagination, and the intellect. It is the painting that reveals and projects into the visible the reflections of the invisible.

It would be difficult to acknowledge an abuse or exaggeration in the author’s claim, placing *The Tempest* among religious works. Naturally, this is quite a different religiosity than the Renaissance (only?) comprehension of a religious canvas. She discerned in the perception and reflection of Giorgione an unprecedented attempt at a totally new understanding of its meaning:

Giorgione - as far as we know - did not leave behind any religious paintings (...). This too is not unusual for those times. I have the impression that this fact is connected with the attitude, which we sense in The Tempest, as if he wanted to discover a different form for the sacrum, a form not foreseen in the official canon and one about which he too did not know, matching shapes and colours, eliminating the first sketch, and conducting a further search. According to him the sacrum was further from man (further than in the Christian missive - after all, so strongly anthropocentric) and closer to direct experiences of the world, that vibrating light, air, and earth shown in such a disturbing manner in The Tempest. (CMKW, 49)

Giorgione discovered and with brilliant virtuosity demonstrated that a painting, regardless of the theme, can be a congenial medium of metaphysics.⁷ That a patient contemplation of the puzzle of the visible, the concentration of ways of the appearance of light, guides beyond its boundaries, towards a harmonious coexistence of “the visible and the invisible”. That the greatest achievement of the art of painting is not aesthetic entertainment, but can become the most profound form of cognition. To put it differently: that a painting does not have to be merely a screen of reality, but can turn into an instrument of its r e v e l a t i o n, disclosure, as the Latin interpretation suggests. A revelation of the limits of the visible.

5.

In Polish: “light “and “world” (*światło* and *świat*) are connected by an astonishing lexical similarity. As we have seen, in Venice light assumes extraordinary creative power. It reveals the world and extracts qualities in it that were not anticipated. It is the fundamental building material of paintings – those specific products, “new worlds”. Yet another unusual component of Bieńkowska’s narration is connected with the nature of the latter: reflection on the miracle of the birth of Venice. An attempt at an explication

of the creative act. At this stage, we abandon the aesthetic discourse and plunge into the dark terrains of ontology.

Taking into consideration purely rational reasons, Venice, that strange civilizational and aesthetic product, simply should not exist. This is obvious. It should not be and yet it is. Despite all gathered knowledge about the history of Venice it is impossible to find some rational reason for its existence. It is pure impossibility, a paradox, a curiosity, a freak of Nature, or, as some claim, a miracle. It follows that Venice actually engages the mind not only and not predominantly as a town-planning problem but as a serious ontological puzzle, as a cipher that has to be decoded. What is the origin of Venice, what are the reasons for its existence? If for a moment one would relegate - since it is impossible to reject them completely – political, eco-

nomical, and sociological reasons based on otherwise serious and scientifically confirmed arguments⁸ then there remains only a single possibility of a purely poetic nature: according to it, the town built on a lagoon *ex nihilo* is a folly of human imagination, an insane creative gesture devoid of pragmatic reasons. It is *creatio ex nihilo* repeated in a human dimension.

Venice is an entirely imaginary town. Note, however, that this insane conception lacks the same sort of cold calculation that took place in the case of St. Petersburg, another town on water brought into being by the human *fiat*. Hence, perhaps, in both cases the unreal and phantom-like character, the mixture of dream and awakening that is part of their nature has quite a different dimension. But was it only the human hand that was involved in this project? In the emergence of Venice from non-being the motor force was not merely human imagination. Here, something more was needed: imagination outfitted with divine prerogatives, as in Blake: *The material – and all others - being of Venice at each moment depended on a miracle, a constant preservation in a being which philosophers described as the Supreme Being. Not only did it decide about creation, but in addition it conserves its work from moment to moment; without its incessant attention it would have dissolved in nothingness. The miracle of Venice, basically and actively human and arbitrary, forces us to think about constant, extraordinary intervention – so that which is could exist. So that it would not vanish together with springtime mists, so that it would survive wintertime attacks of freshet, floods flowing from terra firma and drowning St. Mark’s Square, filling basements and undercutting foundations. (CMKW, 98)*

Exactly: the wonder of Venice consists not only of the fact that it was created at s o m e t i m e and was brought to life, but to an equal degree that contrary to all else, and despite the incessant destructive work performed by Nature, political failures or civilizational crises, i t s t i l l goes on. Consequently, there emerges the question: *What calls for greater effort: to create or to ensure duration? To this query, which once excited learned minds, Venice replies: I am, I continue being, the improbable became reality. Today, we know that the danger of gradual and systematic annihilation is real. But do we believe it? It is impossible to treat it seriously when we stand, for example, in Fondamenta Nuove facing the glistening stretch of the lagoon, the cemetery island of San Michele, and to the left, in the background, the less visible and Impressionistically outlined coastline of Murano. It is impossible that the Supreme Being resigned from its achievement, the masterly operation when with human hands and with the assistance of millions of beech posts it lifted out of the salty marshes one of its most magnificent works. What does this mean? Would Venice have to cease existing since the eternal work performed by the sea, the creative-destructive work of man, successfully tackled its*

solidity? With its essence, one that does not have any counterparts in some sort of an emporium of ideas and came into being only across the ages, connected by a dramatic bond with time? (CMKW, 98)

Not for the first time did Bieńkowska make it obvious that Venice is a reality that cannot be explained with a metaphysical dimension, regardless of the way in which it is comprehended. From time to time, therefore, she shifted reflection from languages suitable for architecture or the history of art to unambiguously theological rhetoric. Thus comprehended, not only Venetian masterpieces but Venice as such and conceived as a holistic ontological project containing not merely the miracle of creation but also the mystery of duration, are proof of the living existence of spiritual reality. Here, Venice is not “solely” a magnificent town, nor is it a superficially understood aesthetic dimension, its most profound component constituting its *differentia specifica*.

Venice, as a multi-strata, unique reality is a work of art in its vivid meaning, accentuating predominantly the creative gesture. In other words, it is something that has been produced thanks to the creative act, and this means that it had been elevated to existence *ex nihilo*, without emulating the model of an already existing image. The aquatic *genesis* of Venice matches the exegesis of the creative act performed by George Steiner who showed convincingly how in the emergence of each work of art (a painting, a poem, a sonata) the essential element is randomness. This means that it could be totally non-existent and that the very essence of a work of art includes the fact that it could have been never embodied: *The work of art, of poetics, carries within it, as it were, the scandal of its hazard, the perception of its ontological caprice* (my emphasis – D. C.).⁹ There is no beguiling logic of the necessity of its emergence. How rarely do we realise that such an admired work of art could have never existed! That thanks to some force, which cannot be fully analysed, it emerged from original nothingness. In this sense - one could add - each great work of art (including Venice) fully deserves to be regarded as a miracle since it comprises an open and brutal overcoming of the logic of necessity.

To put it yet differently: in the perspective outlined here Venice proves to be not only one of elements of the visible world (one of many) but something much more: it is a world on a reduced scale, a place in which all the most essential issues of our worldly existence are concentrated, the most profoundly symbolic reality in which, as in textbook definitions of the symbol, extremities and contradictions merge. *Symbolon* combines the spiritual and the material, the totally alien and that which is profoundly own, the conceptual and the imaginary. As Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote: We understand the symbol (...), the experience of the

symbolic, to mean that the individual and the special resembles a particle of being, that the something, which corresponds to it is a promise of supplementing entity and happiness, or that the still sought particle supplementing the whole is a second particle matching our fragment of life.¹⁰ The experiencing of the symbol contains the warmth of the binding mystery but also the poignant certainty of participation in some sort of completeness transgressing our individual nature.

In a genuine, deeply experienced encounter with the reality of the symbol our gaze seems to be turned towards the observer. The symbol is a mirror, in which our most profound spiritual “I” is looking at itself. This cognition is not only the recognition of that which is different but also self-cognition. Perhaps it is in this particular circumstance and not in literary inertia, the film legend or the pressure exerted by mass-scale tourism that one should seek the true force of the endless attraction of Venice and its hypnotising gaze. All those seduced by Venice constantly stressed that they suddenly found themselves in a totally alien and exotic space, but at the same time never felt more at home. More, they argued that despite the cognitive resistance initially put up by the town they ultimately felt an inexplicable unity with it. Such statements make it possible to understand a certain recurring circumstance: extremely emotional reactions to rumours about the annihilation of Venice. This is not difficult to comprehend: what would we care about the death of Venice, prophesied time and again, if we did not notice in this fact a prefiguration of our death?

6.

There is not a shadow of doubt: in her book Ewa Bieńkowska disclosed extremely aptly several earlier unknown or only slightly recognised faces of Venice. Do not delude yourself, however, that we have finally found out what Venice is really like, and that while reading the book we have reached some sort of an “objectively existing” essence of the town that can be measured, tested, and confirmed. Actually, Bieńkowska has added to the web of the myth, laboriously woven for centuries, yet another thread by writing a successive version, this time her own. Her two-motif narration – the one about the creative power of light and the one about the origin of Venice – is only a camouflaged variation of the Biblical story about *creatio ex nihilo*. This is the reason why the narration assumes the properties of an archaic myth according to the meaning proposed by studies about religion: a holy story about a powerful event, about the way in which something appeared in the world, came into being, emerged from primeval chaotic magma. This endows the story with a hieratic feature (in the literal, etymological meaning derived from the Greek *hieros*), and ensures that in the intimate discourse about Venice

the heart of the matter involves undoubtedly prime things. Here, Venice is a sign, but not – as in the novel by Brodsky - a *watermark*, but rather a hieroglyph. Not always lucid, sometimes rather illegible, but with all certainty: a holy sign.

II. The deceitful beauty of the mask 1.

One of the images appearing most often in attempts at reaching the essence of Venice is, as we know, the figure of an unreal town. This image, depending on the view, can assume two diametrically different classifications. The unreal, in the eyes of a person enchanted with the town, can mean something extraordinary and dazzling, and describe a world situated at the pinnacle of the scale of his wishes and bewilderment. The unreal is a designation of an object that remains beyond the limits of the imagination, something for which there is no comparison in visible reality. Thus comprehended unreality is the utmost degree of adoration and aesthetic sublimation. It is also, paradoxically, the name of a powerful and multiplied existence. This is a being whose actual unreality is not subject to any sort of discussion or appeal.

The same adjective in the eyes of a sceptic can, however, signify space with deformed ontology. Something that does not exist truly, strongly, and in reality. On the contrary: in this case, unreal Venice proves to be merely collective hypnosis, a cognitive illusion inherited across the centuries and concealing the real image of things. In that case, the town on the lagoon is no longer an enchanting *curiosum*, but a being with an

extremely doubtful identity; a town that not so much exists as pretends that it exists. A town of artificial beauty and tawdry glitter. Tombac pretending to be gold. A town-planning phantom. This impression is visible in *The Venice Text*¹¹ almost from the very first words.

Here are several instructive examples from different time perspectives.

Eighteenth century. Edward Gibbon, author of the classical *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, whose acrid statement quite often inaugurates a litaney of complaints about Venetian reality, did not conceal his disgust after a brief visit: *I was afforded some hours of astonishment and some days of disgust by the spectacle of Venice.*¹² In this statement let us accentuate not only the historian's extreme disillusionment with the city but the word "spectacle", rather clearly stating that Venetian space is not a real world; on the contrary, it is a world put on show, fleeting, and unreal. In addition, it is a case of poor art producing only distaste and thus worthy of swift oblivion.

Nineteenth century. Mary Mc Carthy quite aptly described the behaviour of John Ruskin, the great codifier of the precious stones of Venice (*The Stones of Venice*), who from an initial enthusiast changed into a faultfinder and a demysticator of Venetian allure: *Ruskin, who was her overdue Jeremiah and who came at the end to detest nearly everything in Venice, spent half his days trying to expose her frauds - climbing ladders in dusty churches to prove (what he had suspected) that the Venetian Renaissance was a false front, a cynical trick (...).*¹³ Here too Venice deludes and pretends to be something



W. Turner, *Veduta dal canale che porta al Lido: la Riva degli Schiavoni* (fragment)
(Source: *Venezia. Acquerelli di Turner*, L'ippocampo, Milan 2008)

that it is not; uttered by Ruskin, such a declaration is a veritable kiss of death.

Twentieth century. This motif of deceit and mendacious illusion returns in the text of yet another serious destructor of the Venetian myth, the outspoken Regis Debray. In a modest volume whose title leaves no place for ambiguities: *Contre Venise*, we encounter entire sets of epithets. The author compared palaces along Canal Grande to a Potemkin mock-up, barely resembling human adobes and totally lifeless.¹⁴ Here is the culmination conclusion: *This city with its theatres, its opera, its masked balls is a theatre itself. (...) Venice is not a city but the representation of a city.*¹⁵ In other words, Venice is a town-model, a town pretending to be a town, something that imitates real life. A town that cultivated a beautiful illusion and celebrated a world of theatrical illusion for so long that it exhausted itself and died, ultimately becoming that, which once was its valued hallmark: a mask devoid of a living, real face.

Twenty first century. In a whistle-blowing article published several years ago in the “Independent” about an apparently immortal question concerning the purposefulness of conserving the crumbling palaces and churches of Venice, the author already in the first sentence pinions the readers with a strong end line: all who had just returned from Venice had taken part in horrendous deceit.¹⁶ This is followed by customary lament concerning the Venetian world of illusion – the effect is enhanced by statements made by eminent men of letters (naturally, including the classics of the destructive current, i.a. the above-mentioned Gibbon and Debray, but also the Italian Futurist Marinetti, with impetus turning Venetian lies inside out¹⁷). The text ends with the poetics of a verdict eliminating all possibilities of an appeal: Venice is not endangered, it is dead.¹⁸ In other words, touring Venice resembles strolling amidst rotting and musty sets, across a gloomy cemetery of past splendour. It is participation in collective hallucination, for which in addition one pays a high fee. But there is something more. This rather funereal description shows clearly that the old slogan *Venice preserved*, so strongly affecting the imagination, is already very outdated.

What is there to conserve, and for what purpose? There is no longer any rational reason to be concerned about a declining town, just as there is no sense in dealing with a painted corpse.

Apparently, times are changing but this dark thread present in Venetian accounts remains almost unbroken. Arguments vary, different comparisons and metaphors circulate, but the basic intuition appears to endure undisturbed.

2.

Among numerous testimonies expressing aversion towards Venice, which in a more or less sophisticated

manner reveals the town’s artificiality, falsehood, and phantom status, we come across an essay by Georg Simmel: *Venedig* (1907)¹⁹ This brief text – sometimes issued in a separate volume together with two other portraits of towns (Florence and Rome²⁰) – is not only a handy catalogue of negative opinions appearing in publications written earlier but also, as can be easily proven, a true architect of demythologisation statements made already after the publication of Simmel’s essay.

Simmel presented his hermeneutics of suspicions in a series of arguments. His demystification of Venice construes images and comparisons that, probably contrary to his intentions, are not semantically transparent and as such outright invite to embark upon an interpretation. It is worth taking a closer look at them. First, let us read this text as neutrally as possible, trying primarily to capture and name the “negative” sets of meanings in it, and then see what they mean and in what manner, but already without the deciphering intention and rhetorical custody of the author. In the case of Simmel the unreality of Venice has many names.

In order to understand something of Simmel’s Venetian lesson it is necessary to first comprehend the way in which he interpreted urban space. This is certainly not rhetoric characteristic for an historian, an architect or a town planner. True, Simmel made fragmentary use of languages typical for professional researchers but he did not identify himself completely with any of them. He did, however, merge them into a peculiar synthesis, typical only for him. Simmel interpreted urban space, first and foremost, as a series of signs or, better still, indices referring to a reality more profound than the visible one.²¹ Hence he saw the town predominantly as a text providing much food for thought. This is an ambiguous and multi-dimensional reality, a significant organism that is not a simple sum of its parts. A laboratory example of such an approach involves fragments dealing with the space of Rome. Here, ordinary sensual perception of urban space became a point of departure for a wider conclusion: hence the multi-storeyed form of Rome is capable of translating the haphazardness, contradictions and irregularity of the history of erecting the town into a cohesive whole, with the top and the bottom granting the sinuous lines of the image of the town guidelines realised by all the details. This is the direction followed by the dynamic of the urban life of Rome: no element, even ancient, alien and unnecessary, can evade its extraordinary vitality. Even dissimilar elements are drawn into this current. The inclusion of old and oldest monuments into later development is a symbolic expression or frozen form of the same element that the dynamic of Roman life presents in a fluid form: the creation of own life unity out of endlessly different elements. [MiD, 56-57]

Simmel depicted Rome as a curious town, which draws the power of its influence from the variety of the elements comprising it. This process takes place both in the spatial dimension (particular “monuments” exert an impact not as isolated objects but as an entity) and temporal dimension (individual epochs in some incomprehensible way merge together, thus creating a palimpsest configuration of harmoniously coexisting strata). In doing so, he disclosed the phenomenon of the whole, which, strangely, individual parts do not cancel but build, although not by means of simple addition. This is why, Simmel insisted, the typical tourist rushing from monument to monument understands little of the genius of Roman space because he does not notice the beauty of the second power inferred from particular beauties and imposed upon them. [MiD, 57] In other words: he is unable to penetrate the veil of the senses and to cross over to the other side of the looking glass, which discloses the spiritual depth of the town, just as he is incapable of putting together particular phenomena of the visible world so that the miracle of the whole could reveal itself.

In a similar – anatomical, holistic, and spiritual - manner Simmel wrote about his favourite Florence, demonstrating at the same time the miracle of its cohesion. Everything in this organism matches: the past, albeit severed from the present, still pulsates in current life, and Nature, which the spirit encircles as if it were its astral body [MiD, 163], remains in a strange symbiosis with works of art. Everything here adds up and mutually supplements, creating a semblance of implemented utopia, an ideal town. Florence is the cosmos of realised Harmony: it is the joy of the mature man who has achieved all that is most essential in life or resigned from it and now wishes to only seek a form for his conquest or relinquishment. [MiD, 168]

3.

The essay written by Simmel about Venice starts as if with an anacrusis, i.e. by defining the principal features constituting a work of art. At first glance, this might seem rather strange but Simmel knew very well what he was doing: he was preparing solid ground for further reflections. A work of art, he maintained, should be always assessed from the viewpoint of its truth or falsehood. A work is genuine when its outer form is a living and adequate expression of reality. Sometimes, however, it may happen that a work of art seems to be referring us to some metaphysical world, which should be expressed in it, but nothing of the sort takes place: particular fragments can be perfect and remain in mutual harmony but the whole is detached from the roots and the greater its perfection the more radically does it lie, pretending to be some sort of inner life, world outlook or religious conviction that it actually denies. [MiD, 177-178]

This is a very relevant statement because the inadequacy of form and content, here depicted by an opposition between the empty interior and the lavish exterior, will become a pair of opposites that will work brilliantly in the further part of the text, i.e. the interpretation key to Venetian space.

The entire ideological construction of Simmel's text is based on a juxtaposition between Florence and Venice. As we know, such an approach is by no means new in the history of ideas. Already once in the history of European culture we have dealt with such an acute contrast of both towns. Then, the heart of the matter was the essence of painting and the way of constructing a canvas. Renaissance treatises endlessly discussed a certain fundamental problem: what comes first, what is more important: drawing or colour? ²² In this dispute the names of both towns were for the time being extracted from the space of geography and politics and rendered legible emblems of a certain painterly attitude. Florence, therefore, is a model-like embodiment of *disegno*, the primacy of drawing over colour. Venice is just the opposite, i.e. the domination of *colorito*, a passion for the constructive role of colour and the weaker role of the line. This is a contradiction not to be reconciled.

In the writings of Simmel we also encounter a harsh contradiction, but the principle of the opposition is different. This time we are dealing with the function fulfilled by architecture, and more precisely: the idea of the town concealed behind real buildings. Or perhaps something more: the very conception of life obscured by town-planning premises. In Simmel's essay Venice is the model-like reverse of Florence, its sick contradiction, an ominous anti-thesis.

Start with a comparison of the architecture of both towns. The most profound differences between the architecture of Venice and Florence probably lies in the fact that in the palaces of Florence, or rather the whole of Tuscany, we perceive the outer aspect as an adequate expression of the inner meaning: as a vainglorious, grave and lavish demonstration of power tangible in almost every stone. Each palace represents confident, sovereign personality. On the other hand, Venetian palaces are sophisticated playthings, whose uniformity masks the individuality of their residents, a veil whose folds are arranged in accordance with the rules of its beauty while showing the life concealed beneath only by hiding it. [MiD, 178-179]

Simmel did a lot so that his conceit would become convincing. Earlier remarks about the work of art are skilfully transferred into urban space. The yardstick of the evaluation of architecture is the degree of concurrence between the expression and the contents or reference to an archaic differentiation between form and contents. Florentine palaces are transparent in the function of expression and do not conceal anything.



W. Turner, *Chiarore mattutino sulla punta di Santa Maria della Salute, sullo sfondo de Zitelle*, (fragment).
(Source: *Venezia. Acquerelli di Turner, L'ippocampo*, Milan 2008)

They find total fulfilment in their revelatory function. The opposite is true in the case of Venetian architecture. In order to defend his thesis Simmel was willing to sacrifice even elementary respect for facts and common sense, i.e. only someone for whom the initial conceit is more important than *empiria* verifiable at a single glance can maintain that Venetian palaces are identical (by way of example, take a look at Ca'd'Oro, Ca'Rezzonico, Palazzo Dario – what depressing similarity!). Let us move on, since palaces concealing life are not the end.

Sailing along Canal Grande we know that life, regardless of its nature, is certainly different. Here, in St. Mark's Square, the piazzetta, we feel the iron will of power, the murky passion embedded behind this tranquil phenomenon. The latter, however, seems to live in a state of ostentatious separation from being, and the exterior does not receive from the interior any sort of guidelines or nourishment; it heeds only the laws of art, which appear to be outright established for denying the former. When, however, even the most perfect art does not conceal a meaning of life – or when it opposes it – then art becomes artificial. Florence is perceived as a work of art since its obvious form is connected with life, which has undeniably abandoned it but still loyally stands by its side. *Venice is an artificial town*. Florence will never become a mere mask because its phenomenon resounded with the pure voice of real life, while in Venice, where all tranquillity, lightness, and freedom served only as a facade for a sombre and violent life, unrelentingly striving towards its goal, the twilight of this life left behind only unfeeling decorations, the false beauty of the mask. [MiD, 179]

The same old story. Florence is transparent for the inner senses while Venice is falsehood that conceals emptiness. Florence continues being, as in the past, a work of art while Venice is a mere extract of artificiality. Despite lexical similarity, art and artificiality are

not quite the same. The reason lies in the fact that historical life, *ergo*, true life, even though it has abandoned both towns (here Simmel does not seem to protest so strongly), in some mysterious way still exerts an imprint on Florentine architecture, continues being present in it, and permeates it in an outright intimate manner, while a Venetian *palazzo* is only an old skin (the external) cast off by a once living and vital organism. We are compelled to accept this intuition at face value in view of the fact that Simmel did not offer any arguments. One could ask the justified question: what was that "real life" supposed to mean and why does it still appear in Florence while totally abandoning Venice?

Simmel went even further in intensifying an image of artificial (unreal) Venice. Apparently, in the Venetian *theatrum* it is not only buildings but also people that lose their vitality, while the town sucks their blood and changes them into a collection of shadows. Simmel made creative use of the not particularly original figure of Venice as a theatre, without losing anything of his initial intuition:



W. Turner, *Porta della Carta, Palazzo Ducale*, (fragment).
(Source: *Venezia. Acquerelli di Turner, L'ippocampo*, Milan 2008)

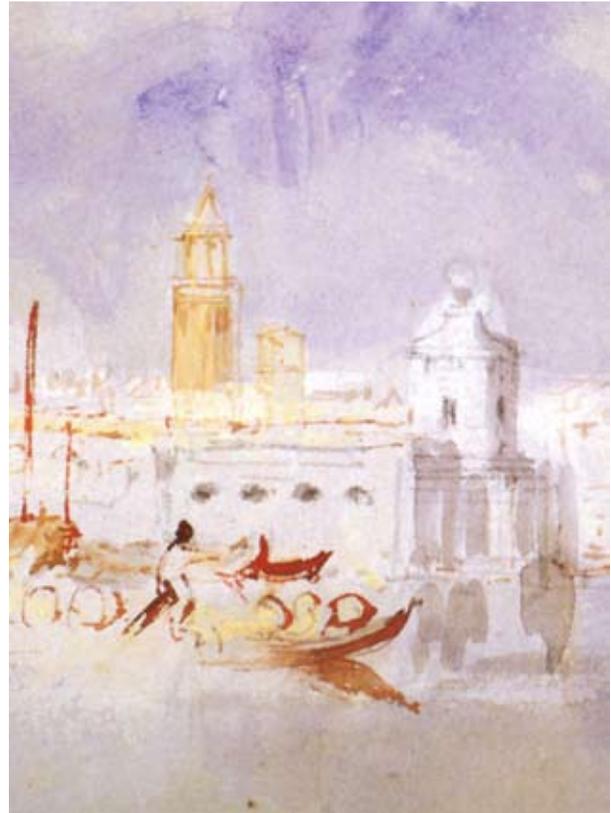
In Venice *people walk as if across a stage*, busy with barren dreams or undertakings that yield nothing; they incessantly appear around a corner and immediately vanish around another one, always resembling actors meaningless beyond the stage because on it there takes place a play devoid of causes and effects for the reality of the next moment. The work of art binds particular elements into a single whole and imposes its own meaning; consequently, in Venice the image of people appears to be shallow. They walk and stand, buy and sell, watch and speak – all within the enchanted circle of the town, where illusion is detached from being and seems to be two-dimensional, added to its real and definitive essence. But this concealed essence appears to be dead, and all activity resembles a facade without a background, one part of an equation whose second part has been obliterated. [MiD, 179-180]

Anticipating by several decades the statement made by Debray about Venice, which is no longer a town but only pretends to be one, Simmel demonstrated the way in which in Venice the most ordinary town-planning elements creating every other town are subjected to striking deformations causing a significant shift of their normal function:

Here even bridges lose their exhilarating power. As a rule, a bridge accomplishes an extraordinary feat and in one swoop establishes tension and conciliation between points in space, moves between them, makes it possible to experience their division and union. This dual function, which endows a purely picturesque phenomenon with deeper and vital significance, fades in Venice, the streets slide over innumerable bridges as if along an even road, and it seems that at this point a street is only taking a deep breath without interrupting its unvarying course. [MiD, 180]

Worse yet. In Venice changing seasons become almost invisible. The poor and fragile vegetation of Venice, Simmler claimed, seems to be deprived of roots, and thus while normal vegetation always testifies to the vitality of the base, here it appears to be suspended in air and easily merges with the lifeless stone mock-up. The reason why Venice appears to be devoid of all symptoms of life, and that, which intensifies its phantom-like dimensions, is a special daily, routine rhythm not encountered in any other town:

There probably does not exist another town whose entire life would possess a *single and identical tempo*. No vehicles or draught animals compelled to chase each other at the same speed, or gondolas moving at the rate, and according to the rhythm, of pedestrians. This is the reason why Venice always appeared to be a "dream". As a rule, reality stimulates us: the spirit, left to its own devices or subjected to a uniform impact, would remain in a state of inertia and only a change of experiences directs it towards an external existence, which would interrupt its leisure.



W. Turner, *Santa Maria della Salute e la Dogana, viste dalle Zitelle, sullo sfondo Il campanile di Santo Stefano*, (fragment).

(Source: *Venezia. Acquerelli di Turner*, L'ippocampo, Milan 2008)

This is why uniform and long-lasting stimuli act in a hypnotic manner and the continual rhythm creates a dimmed state of unreality. The monotony of all Venetian rhythms deprives us of the stimuli and shocks necessary to experience reality and trusts us into a dream of sorts, in which we are surrounded by illusions of things – without the things as such. The spirit, embroiled in the rhythm of this town, becomes immersed in an ambiance that the aesthetic image of the town proposes in the form of objectivity: as if only the upper, reflecting strata of the spirit breathed while its



W. Turner, *Gondola e chiaro di luna*, (fragment).
(Source: *Venezia. Acquerelli di Turner*, L'ippocampo, Milan 2008)

full reality remains on the side, apparently submerged in idle slumber. Living by means of contents severed from the substance and experiences of real life we participate in the lie of Venice. [MiD, 181]

It is precisely this sensoric deprivation offered to us by Venice that contributes on yet another level to experiencing it as a phantom deprived of the substrate of reality. In the final conclusion, maintained in a pessimistic mood just like the previous comments, Simmel returned once again to initial intuition according to which Venice is pure surface devoid of all foundation, an illusion through which no being can be seen. Once again there appears the positive figure of Florence, whose buildings, images, and space preserve the life current that once was the source of their existence. If, however, an illusion to which no being ever corresponded and whose contradictory beings had perished, pretends that it constitutes life and entirety, then it is a common lie and as if an embodiment of the ambiguity of life. The dark and symmetric squares without vehicles that appear to resemble a chamber are just as ambiguous as the crowds unavoidable in narrow lanes and creating the illusion of intimacy and the "cosiness" of life (...); the small, dark canals whose water uneasily quivers and flows, but one cannot distinguish the direction in which it moves without reaching a goal, are equally ambiguous. [MiD, 182]

The horror of the hollow and the horror of unextinguishable ambiguity. If I am correct, in the definitions accentuated above Simmel anticipated a phenomenon of *simulacrum* described several decades later. Venice is a gigantic lie, the illusion of all illusions, a facade that conceals nothing. This is probably the most brutal disillusion performed by the philosopher. There is nothing behind this otherwise beautiful screen, which Venice is according to universal belief, behind this curtain.... A dark well of nothingness. Time, therefore, to remove the film off our eyes and start looking at Venice open-eyed. To see what it really looks like. *Also sprach* Simmel.

4.

The effect of the exposing interpretation proposed by Simmel is shattering. But naked truth is never appetising. Simmel believed that Venice finally disclosed its genuine self – naked and featuring ugly nudity, repulsive, devoid of the veil of sugar-coated images, *this grossly advertised wonder, this Golden Calf on clay feet, this trompe-l'oeil, this painted deception, this cliché*²³ – one could add at this point a contemporary (and so very "Simmelian" in spirit!) commentary by McCarthy to the opinions of those who had not succumbed to the charms of Venice.

Note that the philosopher's disillusion is multi-motif and takes place on several levels. It is precisely because it appears in various domains simultaneously

that it possesses such an extensive impact. Let us, therefore, gather all the invectives and epithets addressed to Venice. Venice is an illusion, a falsehood (the epistemological level), a lie, pretence, a theatre (the ethical level), an imitation (the aesthetic level) and, finally, an illusion, a dream, a non-being (the ontological level). We can see, therefore, that the infirmity of Venice cannot be reduced to only a single level. On the contrary, on all the essential levels of human experience the town is located in the decidedly negative regions on the scale of values. The diatribe by Simmel contains a striking thought, i.e. that Venice as a whole, in all of its aspects, is a being tainted by an irremovable blemish. It is, therefore, a reality that one has to decidedly oppose. This is the last nail in the coffin of Venice: an otherwise beautiful elegy written to commemorate its departure of no return.

As I mentioned, Simmel's text has an essential place in the long history of visions concerning Venice. He is probably the most eminent on the list of "negativists". His grimaces and maledictions did not remain, as in the case of many others, only upon the level of impressions but subjected the latter to a discursive analysis with a theoretical underpinning. There seems to be little sense in conducting a polemic with visions (I already mentioned certain doubts concerning, so to speak, "material truth" while discussing the text). The truth of visions lies in their very existence. One thing, however, in Simmel's writings is annoying and calls for a commentary: I have in mind the thesis about the ambiguity of life, mentioned at the end of his statement.

To put it in plain terms, I am concerned with the fact that the description of Venetian architecture and life performed by Simmel - many would call it extremely apt! (by way of example, who would question a thesis about the vividly theatrical dimension of Venice?) - does not have to produce the obvious conclusions, which he drew upon the basis of observation. If one were to delve deeper into *The Venice Text*, then for each of the "negative features" mentioned by Simmel one could easily find a neutralising "positive quality".

Here is one instructive example: the widely disseminated and known topos of Venice perceived as a dream, also present in Simmel's writings. Simmel keenly registered the monotony of the stimuli offered by the town, the repetitiveness of Venetian rhythms, the striking immobility of the sets in which local life runs its course. (And this is the reason why Venice always appeared to be a "dream"). These observations were rapidly associated with the nature of a dream in order to draw even quicker the conclusion that this slumbering Venice has an unambiguously negative (mendacious, depriving of real traits, detaching from the truth) impact upon the people residing therein.

This part of an observation, however, does not contain anything of preordained necessity. Here are two counter-fragments about somnolent Venice to support the thesis:

Venice makes an impression of things seen in the enchanted semi-shade of some sort of a dream. The curious magnificence of this town, resembling a flower emerging from deep waves, the strange absence of all noise – there are no automobiles, carriages or other vehicles – produce the illusion that we are strolling along the chambers, halls, and porches of a bewitched castle. Light, possessing the glimmer and sparkle of rays cast by diamonds, and isolation amidst the abyss of the sea grant extraordinary power to this vision-dream.²⁴

This description seems to be somewhat familiar: the striking peace, quiet, and immobility of the town as well as the association of those observations with sleep. The conclusion, however, is totally different. Such drowsiness does not cause slumber. It does not lie. On the contrary: it intensifies impression and transfers into an extraordinary sphere, although there is no mention of any sort of betrayal of “real” life for the sake of some sort of passing illusion. Just the opposite, there is the joy of becoming familiar with another sphere of life and its intensity, not encountered on a daily basis. Instead of expected passivity and sensual torpor, as in the writings of Simmel, there is ecstasy.

Yet another fragment enhancing this recognition from another side and interesting not because it abrogates Simmel’s definition (Venetian ambiguity) but demonstrates its one-dimensional character and limitation:

*It suffices to free oneself from the carnival-spectacle Venice, to immerse oneself in it at night or at dawn, to come here in the autumn or the winter in order to understand its true nature. A dream experienced while awake. (...) What is the essence of the dream - reality intensified, enhanced and powerful and combined with endless changeability, fragility, and fleeting qualities - this is also the essence of Venice. There are no towns in the world equally concrete and full of life and, at the same time, illusory, enmeshed in echoes, sounds, the chiaroscuro, and mirrored reflections*²⁵.

Here, in turn, Venice does not seem to resemble slumber but actually is its essence. Note, the person proposing the description not only does not become distracted while pondering the degree of the real nature of his experience, but outright cultivates this state of uncertainty, ontological suspension typical for the moment of transition between sleep and awakening. Just as in the previous example, Venice asleep is a different and, it is impossible to hide, better dimension of existence. It is a space in which one would like to live.

La vida es sueño, as Calderon put it. This phrase still possesses the power of somber recognition. Who

errs: those, who like Simmel, refer Venice to the land of illusion and non-being, or rather those who see it as an instrument for the recognition of the true nature of the world?

What do the cited descriptions prove? I suspect that looking at Venice Simmel perceived it extremely keenly, as his comments convincingly prove. The trouble is that his perception is based on negative pre-comprehension (its causes could be perhaps explained by a psychoanalytical discourse). The latter is, in turn, founded on a conviction (illusion?) maintaining that there exists somewhere (where?) a world that is free of ambiguity. His animosity towards Venice is, therefore, not the outcome of a defect of sight but of the pressure of an intellectual project. Its source is unattainable longing for a realm of unambiguity, full of transparency and realised harmony. Such a world, however, occurs only in fairy tales.

III. Pasticcio

1.

For each visitor arriving in Venice for the first time, waking up in this town is an exceptional event. Waking up in Venice with a tremendous hangover grants this unusual experience an even more special flavour:

*I awoke from the surrounding morning noises with such regret and sorrow inside that, even having opened my eyes, for a long time I remained motionless, without the strength to shake myself and to remove this torpor, uninvited just before dawn. (...) I ended up in Venice. I awoke in an antique bed, on multi-coloured sheets that smelled of quince and dry apricot blossoms. A high and clean ceiling is above me with an ornamental decoration, which doesn't remind me of anything. Around me is an entire collection of fine objects made of silver, walnut, ebony, sandalwood, ivory, bronze, terra-cotta, lace, velvet. Before me – five entire days and nights in this reality more like a hallucination.*²⁶

This situation, as can be seen, is unfavourable, to say the least. A headache, unclear recollections of yesterday’s excesses, and all-pervading sadness. The person who one morning found himself in this opulent setting is Stanislas Perfetsky, the rarely sober Ukrainian poet, musician, performer, and main protagonist of the exciting book by Yuri Andrukhovych - *Perversion*. Perfetsky was invited as one of several speakers at an international conference held on the Venetian island of San Giorgio Maggiore under the evocative title: “The Post-Carnival Absurdity of the World: What Is on the Horizon?” This is only the beginning of his Venetian escapade and nothing foretells its bloodcurdling successive course.

Perversion can be read in several ways. It appears to be outright programmed for a series of diverse albeit not necessarily mutually excluding interpretations. One can, or rather should first read it with a naïve (this does not mean: imprudent) attitude, enjoying the

inane adventures of Perfetsky in Venice and finding extraordinary pleasure in participating in the untamed element of creating a fictional plot. One can conduct a useful analysis of the language and treat the novel predominantly as a tempting exercise in poetics. Or it could be read in a more cultural dimension, discovering the voice of its author among those who deliberate on the present-day shape of Europe.

Yet another, promising, and not at all marginal track appears to be an interpretation of Andrukho- vych book from the viewpoint of the image of Venice depicted therein. Placing the plot in this particular town was a decision of great semantic importance. Consequently, there arise a number of questions. What sort of an image of the town emerges from the text? In what sort of meaning contexts does it appear? What are the characteristic symptoms of this portrayal? What is the relation of the portrait of a town presented in *Perverzion* to the long, after all, list of its literary representations? We shall follow the traces of those questions.

2.

Before we broach the topic of Venice and its assorted perverse images, first a few words about the book and its literary dimensions since literariness - alongside various other assets - is its chief substance. With Venice as the prime target one cannot forget this fact.

Perverzion takes place entirely in the language, is constructed of words (and not ideas!), and simply does not exist beyond abundant, rich, living, pulsating, unexpected, and innovative language. This is important since upon one of its levels of meaning it can be easily deciphered as a novel about language, its endless potential and causal force. This is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to propose a summary. The second reason is the multi-motif and polyphonic - in the precise meaning of the word - construction. There are numerous differently sounding voices, styles, poetics (an autobiographical confession, an interview, a report, an interrogation, official printed matter, a libretto text, a last will and testament...). By making use of those testimonies the narrator tries to determine what actually occurred to Perfetsky in Venice and to explain the mystery of his strange - possibly suicidal - disappearance. As a genre the book is a hybrid: a crime story, a romance, a picaresque novel, and a fantastic vision.

The novel has been classified rather unambiguously as an almost model-like example of a postmodern text, and such features as a mistrustful usage of language or genre unsteadiness were supposed to support this opinion. As is known, labels quite often serve the excellent mood of the person who does the labelling rather than actually describe the objects to which they

refer. The adjective: "postmodern" granted to Andrukho- vych novel wants to express in an abbreviated form everything but actually says nothing. The issue at stake is much more complicated.

True, superficial familiarity with the book might confirm the conviction that we are dealing only with unhindered literary fun and thrilling attempts at games played with language. From the viewpoint of the latter the narration is, first of all, an element of parody, pastiche, and the aping of assorted stylistics and types of articulation. Here everything is upside down. The presented world is governed by excess and caricature, an incessant mixture of comic and serious elements, and thus components of a literary convention known as the grotesque. These are, after all, distinctive signs of the text belonging to the postmodern camp.

On the other hand, there is too much meta-critical laughter and self-ironic attacks not to notice that this - ever so! - postmodern stylistic serves not solely fun but a l s o the process of doubting certain obvious traits of postmodern dogmatics. Quite possibly, it assists first and foremost the most popular postmodern mantra about the all-embracing game and lack of *gravitas* as a response to the breakdown of the fundamental intellectual, theological, and ethical orders of modern times. To put it still differently: Rabelaisian laughter conceals serious identifications. This observation already transfers us directly to the cultural reflection present in the novel.

Everyone who embarks upon a commentary to *Perverzion* is defeated at the very onset. It is not only impossible to summarise this book properly, but its gargantuan laughter effectively safeguards it against "researchers specialising in insect legs". Let us try, however, to perform several analytical motions while fully aware that in this situation they must resemble piercing a living butterfly with the dull pin of discourse.

3.

What does Venice look like in the text of *Perverzion*? One would like to say: this is Venice treated ironically, as is everything else. To put it as briefly as possible: we are dealing with an erudite discourse of parentheses.²⁷ The author is well aware that literary Venice - especially in its popular version - is to a considerable extent a lot of faded allegories and moribund metaphors.²⁸ And that he is writing his "Venetian" text on a thick pile of texts left behind by his predecessors. His originality, after all, consists of the absence of originality, however paradoxical that may sound. Instead of new allegory he creates a gripping and frenzied collage (or, perhaps even better, a patchwork) of all that had been written about Venice across the centuries. A number of conventional metaphors, comparisons, associations, and motifs present in numerous

descriptions of the town – all this has been subjected to parodistic travesty.

Take the first of many examples: a motif permeating European imagination from the end of the nineteenth century, the agony of Venice vanishing and slipping into the sea. Here is a pertinent declaration of aged (He looks at least a hundred years old [P, 71]) Professor Casallegro ²⁹, who appears in the text as himself but also as a personified, so to speak, history of Venice. More, he fulfils the function of chairman of the “La morte di Venezia” (sic!) foundation and organiser of an international conference: *Venice is dying, Mr. Perfekcy (...) The true death of Venice will happen not from swallowing by the sea or sand, not from floods or heavenly thunder (...) All this is only external, that is, apparent, that is nonessential (...). Entire institutions exist that have been summoned to save Venice (...). They stirred up a multitude of ideas, each more clever than the next (...). And now – for the sake of saving this stone, this gold, this marble, these stuccos and mosaics, this pigeon dung – several eggheads even propose to move this entire Venice to some safe and drier place (...). The monuments that will perish in these dirty waters, as it were, are dearer than (...). Otherwise, asses would have wanted to chase away everything living from here including the shitty pigeons and to preserve everything here in perpetuity (...). They contend that no one should be living here in twenty-five years. Such an, you know, accident zone (...). So that only ghosts of people should rush along the canals on ghosts of gondolas (...).* [P. 64, 65]

This extraordinarily funny literary realisation of arguments about moribund Venice, usually presented with deadly seriousness, is yet another answer to the question: what should be done with Venice, how to put a halt to its gradual disappearance?

Further: the Venetian theatre and opera, Venice conceived as a theatre, and the opera-like qualities of Venetian life. It is worth checking how these lofty conceptions are faring today. In a bravura operatic sequence Andrukhovych reduced them to ground level, thus demonstrating their cheap and dubious side. The object of his sarcastic attacks is one Matthew Kulikoff, announced by the “La morte di Venezia” foundation as: *one of the most well known opera directors and innovators of the contemporary world.* [P, 171] It is he who was commissioned to stage the opera *Orpheus in Venice* so that it may function as a musical appendix to the scientific seminar. Here is the director, whose statement disgraces the entire undertaking in a manner that does not call for lengthier commentaries - his invitation to the premiere says:

I was terribly enthralled with the idea of doing an opera in such a legendary city. Because right here, in this island state saturated with culture and its institutions, is quite appropriate for embodying one of my mad intentions - to create an opera beyond operas, an opera of operas, where

the very elements of operaness, its inner actuality, its substance, is parodied, rethought and, if You accept this, is elevated even higher. To my assistance came the old Italian experience of the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries (to the point, the centuries of the most luxurious flowering of Venice). I have in mind the so-called pasticcio, when new operas were created on the basis of the deconstructing and recombination of elements of operas that already existed. The historical-cultural space of Venice, its topi, its genius loci, it seems, assisted me in my work. The spiritual landscape of the Italian opera tradition had no less meaning for me. Finally, the space of the stage and the hall - the magic of this fantastic space, the Teatro La Fenice, its aura. And countless other spaces in addition - the individual creative spaces of each, who believed me and worked with me on the same team. [P, 172-173]

True, the director was not lying. The music of this opera is a combination of works by Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Donizetti, Bellini and several other composers, and its structure does recall a *pasticcio* – but this time comprehended literally, as a *pâté*. Or as an aesthetic monstrosity. The opera libretto contained in the book is undoubtedly the work of a madman. Thrilled with his own genius, the opera director Matthew Kulikoff, together with his crazed vision of an opera about Orpheus as an entity made up of fragments of the existing world, proves to be an idiot submerged in self-adoration. His opera about Orpheus in Venice turns out to be complete drivel and a postmodern fiasco of the idea of a total work. ³⁰ Only literature salvages this verbal-musical *pâté*.

In order to take a closer look at the auteur strategy of demythologisation let us examine one of the figures often exploited in literature: Venice as a crossing of the worlds, as the *hinge of Europe*. ³¹ Venice as a meeting place of the culture of Western and Eastern elements. As a gateway to the East, a bridge between the East and the West. Those methodical tropes have become firmly embedded in European writings and imagination. Entering St. Mark's Square, the protagonist of Henry James' *Travelling Companions*, admitted: *I had left Europe; I was in the East.* Theophile Gautier described the basilica of St. Mark as an *Oriental dream*. Jan Morris in: *The World of Venice* wrote outright: *In Venice the Orient began*, and John Ruskin in his monumental: *The Stones of Venice* described the beauty of the basilica: *It possesses the charm of color in common with the greater part of the architecture, as well as of the manufactures, of the East.* In turn, Boris Pasternak saw the colour gamut of night-time Venice in the company of such words as: *halva and Chaldea, the magi and magnesium, India and indigo.*

It is to this well-established topos: Venice as a place where, as that old banal saying goes, “East meets West”, that the novel makes an ironic reference. But is anyone actually meeting someone? And if so, then

what sort of West and what sort of East? What sort of a bridge is this?

One simply has to notice that Andrukhovych granted the well-worn metaphor of a "bridge" linking Western culture and the Oriental element an entirely new meaning, one with a changed sign. The East, the Orient, which usually acted as a cryptonym of a mythical and exotically conceived version of the world of Islam, here denotes simply post-Soviet Ukraine, while halva and magnesium are replaced by the products of the spirits industry.

At the conference a representative of the former Soviet colony is treated with condescending superiority. A constantly recurring motif is that of the absence of any sort of knowledge about Ukraine among envoys of the civilised world. The organisers of the conference perceive Ukraine as an earthly version of a Never Never Land, a phantom reality somewhere on the very edges of the inhabited world. A distant and peripheral land on the border of non-being. A land somewhere at the end of a map, assuming that it actually does exist. A country-phantom. Its real name means nothing and thus it appears in official papers in different versions as: Urania, Ukrania, czy Ukraya, so as to include this unmarked particle into the world of linguistic and cartographic imagination.

The Ukrainian, however, remains unconcerned and openly demonstrates his feeling of affiliation with Europe. During confession heard by the vicar of the church on San Michele, which smoothly turned into an alcoholic binge, Perfetsky admits to a number of truths about his origin. We learn about this dialogue from the priest's account: *"I've come here from a really distant land. May be you don't even know about it, Father Antonio. Suffice to say I was born in a little town in the mountains, quite close to the center of Europe"* At this point it seemed to me that he wasn't completely rational. *"What are you saying?"* I was surprised. *"Is it so far from here? Isn't the center of Europe somewhere in Switzerland?"* *"No, Father, amid different, entirely different mountains, far from here!"* he insisted. *"Perhaps in the Ural Mountains?"* I myself remembered something from school lectures on geography. *"No, not the Urals, but in the Carpathian Mountains, Father"*, he corrected me. *"Some of you still call them the Caucasus"*. [P, 110]

This exemplary lesson of cultural relativism demonstrates the scale of misunderstandings. The centre of Europe is not an immobile point. On the contrary, its location depends on the place where opinions are formulated. Hence the very concept of Europe has nothing of pre-established unambiguity and changes depending on who is speaking and where he lives. It is easy to guess, therefore, that the appearance of a phantom representative of equally phantom peripheries in the cultural centre of civilised Europe becomes the cause of a number of unusual events.

Perverzion is not, therefore, yet another text evoking close historical relations - actually intense and present in a multitude of domains - between Venice and the Oriental world, but introduces a refreshing and cognitively enriching *novum*. It confronts the old figure of Venice as the gateway to the East with the entirely contemporary dilemmas faced by Europe. Cultural Europe, focused on its centuries-old civilisational lineage, is now forced to tackle new savages. As always, they arrive from the East. Is this barbarian Ukrainian people a tribe totally alien or one of us? Perfetsky goes far to demonstrate in his complex lecture the reasons why Ukraine could never belong to this part of the world: *Where Europe was just beginning to arise, to grow, to be constructed, at the same instant Asia revolted, demanding the establishment of its despotic and simultaneously anarchic status. At this moment I am not saying that this is bad. But I am just saying that this is its essence, and this essence vehemently contradicts the other essence - the European.* [P, 224-225] The struggle of two tendencies, both facing different directions, determined the history of Ukraine. This exuberant historiosophy, formulated with deep conviction, is to serve Perfetsky simultaneously as a safe conduct pass enabling him to enter European salons.

4.

Another image, permanently linked with Venice, is carnival. Here things become more complicated. The image of the town in the throes of fun (*Are you familiar with Venetian Shrovetide?*³²), with *féeries* of light and the inevitable parade of people concealed behind masks is almost an indispensable and thoroughly exploited element of numerous travelogues and literary and film depictions of Venice. By rendering the carnival the semantic axis of his story Andrukhovych envisaged it much deeper than a mere seasonal festivity. Now, carnival means something different (and much more serious!) than only a period of a temporary suspension of mores or festive debauchery. First and foremost, carnival or, more precisely, its decline – real or merely presumed – is, as we remember, the topic of a conference held in Venice. The invitations addressed by the organisers to the participants of the seminar say:

We in Venice are inclined to think that the loss of Carnival has occurred. We can see this. Almost no one can see this - for Carnival exists, it occurs year after year, several times, for various reasons, with fires and masks, with wine and dance. Carnival exists, anyone will tell you from among those who still (or already) do not see and of which they are of countless number. Carnival is becoming bigger and bigger, it's everywhere and uninterrupted, others who are of evil persuasion will tell you.

But is it really this way? Or is it only measured by what is gulped down and devoured? Or with unbelievable

swarms of tourists, Japanese, hotel services, amusements, or with the return of money and losses on pyrotechnics? And is this already only bare mechanics, machinery, cold industry, massive consumption, permanent parasitic behavior? What if it is just a trap? [P, 37]

In Andrukhovych's flamboyant narration "Venetian carnival" is thus a more or less legible figure of the poor world - European contemporaneity. It can be discovered already in the ambiguously sounding "post-carnival" in the title of the Venetian seminar. This peculiar carnival would be, therefore, a reality occurring after the carnival in the classical meaning of the word, some sort of a new mutation characteristic only for our era. Andrukhovych thus accepted similar connotations – such expressions as: post-religion, post-history, post-culture, etc. But if that prefix is changed into a noun then it becomes apparent that it can be understood as Lent (Polish: *post*) carnival, in the metaphorical sense: of little nutritious value, barren, poor. If the term were to be referred to events from the presented world (distinctly carnival events in the novel take place during Lent!), then it might signify also Lent, which assumed the features of carnival and resembled it to such a degree that the differences between them became unnoticeable.

All this is the reason why the contemporary Venetian *post-carnival* turns out to be an open oxymoron, a world based on a paradox. It is a special prank, something openly abnormal. In cultures of the past carnival was, after all, always a time directed against Lent. The formula: "the battle of carnival and Lent" expressed this contradiction well. Here, carnival possesses the features of Lent emanating exhaustion. Consequently, is carnival still possible? Lecturers offer different responses, as a rule do not speak on the topic, or simply jabber. Listen to the end of Perfetsky's speech; speaking chaotically, he at least from time to time refers to the essence. In this fragment he seems to be uttering words that he finds most crucial although the whole time they are affected adversely by the poetics of irony and endless play-acting:

Allow me a single truism just before the end of my talk. I expect that it won't excessively irritate you.

Only love can save us from death. There, where love ends the "absurdity of the world" begins. And I don't think then that "anything" can still remain "on the horizon". Besides emptiness, of course. It attracts, it calls, it pulls - how can we render resistance in this time of "postlove"?

At the least I would want to be like a prophet and forecast something here today. I proposed to your inattentiveness all of just several versions, each of which separately is erroneous, and all together contradicting each other. But all the same I will attempt, even out of such a hopeless situation, to emerge with honor, that is, with a certain conclusion. ...

I hold to the traditional system of notions. If we understand carnival as the extreme strain of the powers of life in all their fullness and inexhaustibility or also the loftier manifestation of the battle between love and death (death as emptiness, as antilife, as nothing), than carnival truly should never end, or, at least, last as long as we have not spent our credit by the Heavenly observer. [P, 237-238]

Jokes aside, it seems that at this stage Andrukhovych said several essential things, already beyond laughter. Although his declarations lack the passion of a missionary and the certitude of the only correct prescription, is there any better place to ask about the future of the carnival than Venice?

The above statement introduced a certain dissonance to the earlier outlined likeness of *post-carnival*. In his sarcastic descriptions of Venetian reality the author unambiguously suggested that contemporary idolatry of permanent fun is no longer a source of joy; on the contrary, it is becoming a source of suffering. That, which once was an emanation of vital forces, today is a symbol of their disappearance. And if not of death then certainly of some form of non-life, pretended life, life deprived of a genuine vital force. The reason why this is taking place lies in the fact that in the past carnival frenzy was a clear-cut caesura in a world ruled by order, and even if norms were not respected it was acknowledged that they existed. Today, in a world of constant fun, a carnival-time mixture of matter, *post-carnival* ceased being a temporary suspension of stable order. There is no more "negative" background against which it would define itself. Everything is carnival, and there where this happens nothing is carnival and the carnival suspension of time is senseless. *Post-carnival* is, therefore, a sad figure of vain time. A contradiction of the frenetic carnival. Sheer exhaustion with fun...

Thus: is carnival still possible? Such questions are addressed to the participants of the Venetian symposium by its organisers, and this is the sort of query that *Perverzion* asks us. The question was formulated in a literary procedure, without any discursive justifications and footnotes, although I claim that it is cognitively profound and culturally essential. If I understood him well, Andrukhovych, who became familiar with the therapeutic properties of carnivalisation as a lifestyle in the Lent-like world of Soviet Ukraine, answers in the affirmative although it is not quite certain whether in the world of liquid values, a world in which the awareness of the tragic properties of life is vanishing (has vanished?), a return to differentiations introducing order into the experience of time is still possible.

It seems, however, that this positive assessment of the carnival is unconcerned with its institutional resurrection. The heart of the matter pertains rather to two issues. First: carnival conceived rather as a certain mental disposition, carnival as a creative emanation

of life, an antidote against false attitudes and impotence typical for the contemporary world, a liberating energy that supplements the already obligatory call: "Everything already has taken place" with the recommendation: "Yes, but everything still awaits to be discovered". Secondly: carnival laughter envisaged as the generator of culturally reviving behaviour. Not the sort, therefore, which takes its anger out in foolish destruction and turning all constant points of reference inside out, but the kind that would possess liberating properties and reveal uncritical attachment to old schemes and intellectual habits, which would disclose their barrenness and cultural chaos. It is difficult to evade the thought that it is precisely *Perverzion* that is an embodiment of such a comprehension of Carnival.

5.

The Latin word: *perversitas* means: reversal. From the literary viewpoint *Perverzion* proves to be predominantly an intelligent and discerning strategy of reversing symbols. The image of Venice depicted in the book seems to be aimed against the most universal Venetian aspects of the discourse: the Bombastic and the Sentimental discourse. The most widely disseminated likenesses of Venice have been turned inside out. There is no fragile ecstasy of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, no desperate decadence of *Death in Venice*, no horror and tightening noose of fear of *The Aspern Papers*. Other, less distinctive examples can be multiplied. Instead of customary solemnity, seriousness, and mournfulness there is overacting and flippancy, and instead of suitable melancholy – irony and sarcasm. Such an in-depth, gut-feeling carnival Venice has never appeared in literature despite the fact that scenes of carnival festivities (in their strictly calendar comprehension) are not, after all, the object of the description!

In other words, carnival-time Venice from *Perverzion* turns out to be a world turned upside down twice and the disappearance of the chief protagonist grants yet another meaning to the trivialised expression: "death in Venice". Andrukhovych was clearly trying to bring the unbearable, contrived quality – so frequent in Venetian rhetoric - down to earth. His objective, however, does not seem to be some sort of a radical disillusion whose culminating conclusion is to set fire to Venice! It rather appears to be – as Debray put it so brutally – to kill in oneself the Venetian illusion (*fantôme de Venise*³³), but not, as is the case in his diagnosis, in the form of hysterical rejection but by keeping a rather emollient, ironic distance. Further targets include the disclosure of the comical and trivial qualities of numerous concepts present in the popular language (only!) of narrations about Venice³⁴ in order to demonstrate how certain emulated images are separated from reality and start living a life of their own, as well as how insufferably flat and secondary is the shape

of the Venetian image in collective imagination. At the same time it must be stressed firmly that this Venice *à rebours*, despite its jeering portrayal, belongs - on par with laudatory texts – to *The Venice Text*, with all that this entails. It plays the role of a counter-sign, an anti-structure, and a negative myth, but regardless of this deciphering gesture it does not cease being part of a wider narration.

Venice in *Perverzion* resembles a crooked mirror in which we might notice a caricature of our vision of this town – cultivated for years, stale, musty, and faded. It is up to us whether we would like to look at our reflection. But who is capable of such perversion?

IV. Resonances

1.

At the beginning - a puzzle. What film starts with the below-cited scene?

A fishing boat sails on a sea with a surface composed of choppy waves. It makes its way towards the dark outlines of islands concealed by a curtain of light cast from the sky. Pearly reflections trickle from the side of Venice, composed of marble and lace, still aslumber and already distant. From time to time they move upwards, piercing the mist suspended above the sea.

The boat contains, apart from the fisherman listening to the regular sound of the engine, also two persons huddled together. A balding, forty-five year old man, dressed inappropriately for this time of the year and observing, with his head lowered, the traces left behind by the boat. Later, we find out that this is Andrei Gorchakov. His face is turned but the general outline makes it possible to notice that he is fair-haired and slender. Gorchakov's right hand is lowered and almost touches the boat. He holds a lit cigarette, which has nearly turned into ash.

Gorchakov's hand remains just above the water. By some miracle the lengthy ash stays on the cigarette. The boat sails along the coast of San Giorgio, slowly moving next to a paginated marble statue. This Titianesque-shaped nude turns its back towards a carefully trimmed hedge. At this precise moment, right in front of the enthralled Eugenie, the marble, cracked, wet, and devoured by time, starts to slowly shift and disintegrates into tiny pieces, as if watched in a slow-motion movie.³⁵

The puzzle is not that difficult. The name of the protagonist in the quoted fragment is already a sufficient clue for many readers. There is no doubt: this is the beginning of *Nostalghia* by Andrei Tarkovsky. I am right: this is not the beginning of the film but of the screenplay! A pity that the scene - stirring the imagination and offering interesting possibilities of its visual version – was ultimately not included in the film.³⁶ After all, it seems to be a distant echo of



Edward Steichen, Venice (1907)

the opening scene of Visconti's *Death in Venice*. A sailing boat, morning light skimming on the water. And Gorchakov At the end of the take he dips his hand *into the water together with the ashes*.³⁷ Gorchakov is a late embodiment of Aschenbach, whose surname, after all, conceals ashes and water. From the very onset Gorchakov is split asunder and looks fleetingly at the surface, but his thoughts follow another direction and suggest distant images. He sails across the lagoon, but *his inner sight perceives the black water of the river Moskva*.³⁸ He is *here*, but he wishes to be *elsewhere*. And this is how things are going to be. The Russian émigré, tired of Italian beauty, longs for home and his native land. This *elsewhere* has very concrete parameters.

One way or another, the title of the film does not lie and is an excellent description of the main theme. Wherever the protagonist goes, and whatever he sees, he is not at home. He is in Italy but cannot bear being without Russia. He is *here* and *now* but he wants to be *there* and *at some other time*. He pines. In his poignant commentary on the film Leonid Batkin wrote a lot about this special Russian variant of nostalgia with its underpinning of despair and - we have to believe him - incurable.³⁹ I evoke the initial fragment of the screenplay for other nefarious purposes. I do not wish to either comment on the film or name the colours of

Russian nostalgia contained therein. Anyway, others had already done this quite thoroughly.⁴⁰

I do, however, want to write about nostalgia. Nostalgia concerning Venice. This is why I evoke (nostalgically?) a scene with which numerous spectators of Tarkovsky's work are probably unfamiliar. Nostalgia is the reverse of anticipating an encounter with it. It is a backward glance. At this moment, I would like to bring to life that, which has turned into a dusty bookmark of memory. To disremember that, which has been ejected, lost, and forgotten. And first and foremost, to ask about the feasibility of travelling in time and what could become a vehicle of a journey into the past, into *le temps perdu*.

2.

We can see immediately that the above-cited scene is lacking something. Obviously, that missing element is music. The point, however, is not simply to add sound to the image delineated with the word. The objective is something more: music fulfilling the function of naming space. After all, there exists a firm conviction persistently recurring in the history of attempts at delving into the Venetian enigma, namely, that music is simply another name for Venice and that Venice does not exist without music. Thus comprehended Venice is in its essence musical, which means

that its distinguishing feature is not at all palpable space – those kilometres of marble beauty – but time. Something much more fragile and difficult to capture. To put it in more precise terms: a special experiencing of time, the flow and compression of time, its whirlpool, but also the halting of time. What sort of music could accompany the recalled scene, what sort of sounds would be capable of carrying its burden? Perhaps this could be the third, “Venetian” quartet by Benjamin Britten, his last musical score with open references to the earlier composed opera: *Death in Venice*? And in particular its last part, *Passacaglia*, whose second name is already much more precise: *La Serenissima*.⁴¹ Music, some claim, is the quintessence of Venice and experiencing the town is purely musical. The most acute observers of Venice were capable of noticing this feature.

In a passage probably most classical for this trope Frederic Nietzsche wrote in *Ecce homo*: *I could not possibly dispense with Rosssini and still less with my Southern soul in music, the work of my Venetian maëstro Pietro Gasit. And when I say beyond the Alps all I really mean is Venice. If I try to find a new word for music I can never find any better than Venice.*⁴² These are the words of Nietzsche – an admirer of Venice, seduced by the city. In the next sentence he immediately added: *I do not know how to draw any distinction between tears and music. I do not know how to think either of joy or the South without a shudder of fear.*⁴³ These are already the sentiments of Nietzsche the ecstatic and the nostalgic, author of a project for a strangely beautiful image of a town in which tears added to music produce a state of solace and in which beauty possesses an inevitable underpinning of horror.

Venetian music. What is its essence, what could be its perfect *audible landscape*, to recall a phrase from Rilke? Philippe Sollers wrote a subjective *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venise*, whose considerable part, unfortunately, proved to be a disappointment since it was painfully predictable (cf. such insightful entries as: “Byron”, “Casanova”, “La Fenice”, “Stravinsky”, etc.). In it he included a number of musical entries. In this tedious catalogue of well-worn images of

Venice the sound emanation of the town appears to be – depressingly obviously – Vivalidi. V like Venice and V like Vivaldi. One cannot hide the fact that this is even quite correct. *If there exists the spirit of a place and a perfectly harmonised spirit of the time then this is it. Two, three chords and we are already on the spot, on the lagoon, between the sky and water, in a sailing ship, a boat.*⁴⁴ *De gustibus non disputandum est*, and the same is true for visions.

It would be difficult to be ignorant of Vivaldi’s birthplace and the town where he wrote his music. Just as it would be difficult to assess his *oeuvre* (still little known, and if so then in a caricature form). When

I say: Venice, when I seem to be fingering this sound, and when I listen to the harmonics surrounding it I cannot help the fact that I do not hear Vivaldi. I do hear, however, Mahler’s *Adagietto* from Symphony no. 5, and I see Dirk Bogarde on a deck arranging a blanket on his lap, the mercury sheen of the lagoon ... What is that you say? That it was not written in Venice or with Venice in mind? That is meaningless. The force of great art consists of the fact that it supplies a vision capable of overcoming us completely and imposing itself with some sort of mysterious ruthlessness. We succumb to it, offering no resistance,

softly. He who has seen the first takes of Visconti’s film is lost for always. This initial phrase, slowly (*sehr langsam!*) unwinding as if a scroll of transparent fabric, those *crescenda* lost in thought, those dark swirls of Mahler’s *Adagietto* – all this will follow him step by step.⁴⁵ The downbeats will always bring to mind Venice and evoke from memory its dark trace. We may defend ourselves, but this is always stronger than us: already after several phrases “Esmeralda” will emerge from the milky mist, in a moment

Aschenbach will cross the empty square where a bonfire will be burning, and thus, due to dark fatalism, he will make his way to the very end towards a chasm, and we shall follow him.

3.

For years, I have been convinced that Mahler enjoyed a monopoly as regards Venice until I saw and then heard a record titled: *Wagner e Venezia!*, made by the Uri Caine Ensemble. A *rara avis*, a true rarity, an audiophile’s treat.⁴⁶ The corrugated cardboard of the navy blue cover, the embossed golden letters, and in the middle a reproduction of a painting by Antonio Rotta: *The Fiancée in a Gondola* (ca. 1880). In the foreground - the outline of a young woman. Her profile and décolletage glimmer. She reclines in a dark cabin (such gondolas were still used at the end of the nineteenth century) and floats on the lagoon. Sunrise seeps through a rectangular opening and the contours of the island of San Giorgio Maggiore (the same as in the scenario by Tarkovsky!) rise in the distance.⁴⁷

In the booklet attached to the record carefully chosen excerpts of texts by Nietzsche and Wagner are accompanied by a series of excellent photographs from the turn of the nineteenth century. *Il teatro Camploy*, from 1876, *Rio del Santa Caterina* (1870), *Piazzetta* (ca. 1900), *Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi* (1855), *Grande gondola* (ca. 890), a portrait of Richard Wagner (1882) and especially the striking *Gran Caffè Quadri* (ca. 1900). In the foreground – five persons at café tables. Judging by their clothes it is early spring or late autumn. The men are wearing double breasted coats and bowler hats. A lady in a hat, with a veil across her face, holds a parasol resting on the ground. Between them

-a boy in a coat and a cap. Further to the right – a waiter in a black jacket, a white shirt with a stand-up collar, and a bow tie. He holds a tea kettle supported on a white napkin draped on the other hand. In the background - three men deep in conversation. Above them - a lampshade. Light coloured (white?) drapes hang from the arcades filling the space between the columns. All stood still for a moment at a sign given by the photographer, with the boy smiling and gazing straight at the lens and thus at us. I mention these reproductions in such detail because they are not ordinary illustrations to texts contained in the booklet. Here the past gains shape. Let us repeat after Barthes his favourite mantra: the photograph says predominantly: *what is*. It freezes the past in a frame.

Wagner first arrived in Venice in 1858 and stayed several months. Interestingly, although he immediately appreciated its charm he found the town boring. Then he changed his mind; here, he wrote the score of *Tristan und Isolde*. Regularly at 11 a.m. he drank coffee at Caffè Quadri. Wagner savoured Venice and breathed it. He received all the impulses produced by the town. This is the way in which he described in his autobiography one of his most intense Venetian experiences: *As I was returning home late one night on the gloomy canal, the moon appeared suddenly and illuminated marvellous palaces and the tall figure of my gondolier towering above the stern of the gondola, slowly moving his huge sweep. Suddenly he uttered a deep wail, not unlike the cry of an animal; the cry gradually gained in strength and formed itself after a long-drawn "Oh!" into the simple musical exclamation: Venezia! This was followed by other sounds of which I have no distinct recollection, as I was much moved at the time. Such were the impressions that to me appeared the most characteristic of Venice during my stay there, and they remained with me until the completion of the second act of Tristan, and possibly even suggested to me the long-drawn wail of the shepherd's horn at the beginning of the third act.*⁴⁸

The composer lived in Venice twice in 1882 and then on his last journey ever. He was not a resident of Venice by birth but, so to speak, by death. Death in Venice: he died on 13 February 1883 at the Vendramin-Calergi Palace on Canal Grande. As John Norwich noticed with thinly concealed irony: For him death in Venice would be fitting.⁴⁹

There are two reasons for the greatness of the *Wagner e Venezia* record and my delight with it. The first is an intelligent and original concept for a creative lesson about the music. The pianist Uri Caine rearranged fragments of Wagner scores, i.a. *Tristan*, *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, and *The Master-Singers of Nuremberg* for a string quartet and a piano with the addition of an accordion (sic!). In other words, for a *café ensemble*. Contrary to appearances, this decision is by no means frivolous nor is it brutally iconoclastic. It is,

however, well aware of the provocative game played with tradition.⁵⁰ Caine admitted that he wanted to transpose the bombastic texture of Wagner's music into a lighter form so as to extract the qualities embedded in it: beauty and kitsch, harmonising so well with the popular image of Venice.⁵¹ He achieved a brilliant de-construction (I firmly stress the creative moment) of Wagner's massive works. The modest sound texture, the chamber *instrumentarium* resound with intense lyricism, but also with the sentimental frosting of certain Wagnerian compositions. This is not an accusation – I am simply stating a fact. Here, the musicians oppose Nietzsche's oft-cited malicious opinions about the chronic decadence and morbidity of Wagner's music.

The effects? It suffices to listen to *Liebested*, excellently rendered by Mark Feldman's violin, or the beautifully performed overture to *Lohengrin*. Just as overwhelming is the *Ride of the Valkyries* executed by violins chiefly in the *pizzicato* technique, thus altering those kilos of sound from the original score into delicate tulle. In turn, the unorthodox use of an accordion introduces a distinctly ironic distance.

The second reason concerns an ostensibly secondary issue, that of the site of the recording. In this case, it turned out not be minor. A small part of the record was made at the Metropol Hotel along Riva degli Schiavoni, but predominantly in the Wagnerian (naturally, shared with Byron, Balzac, Proust...) Gran Caffè Quadri! More important, this is a live recording, a circumstance that cannot be over-estimated. The project was clearly concerned not only with historical deconstruction, but also with taking into account the authentic emotions of the listeners and registering them on the recording together with the genuine sounds of the Venetian phonosphere. Already the very beginning of the record is excellent: unidentified murmurs, partly heard voices, individual instruments, the sound of a water glass or a wineglass; after a longer while, without any previous preparation, this magma produces the beguiling *Liebested* cantilena. The closing fragment of the overture to *The Master-Singers of Nuremberg* is simply a miracle: the last echo of the string instruments is overlaid by an increasingly powerful chime of bells from a nearby *campanile*! Such effects cannot be planned – they are a blessed occurrence or a wonderful decision of fate.

All this is the reason why for several years I have regarded *Wagner e Venezia* - always as an entity together with its iconographic side -as the most incredible and, from another viewpoint, the most credible evocation of Venice. This is a time machine strongly affecting the senses, a poignantly intensive creation of the space in which one would like to reside. Listening to such Wagner I allow myself to be seduced and transported in time already from the very first sounds. Nostalgia

is the child of memory and desire. Due to the melancholic hue and dominating sadness it has much in common with melancholy but is not tantamount to it. Melancholy is prone to enclosure within a chalk circle of depression and contemplation. Nostalgia, on the other hand, contains motion to the outside. Nostalgia is an emotional movement with a dual nature: it includes the initial sweetness of returning (*nóstos*) to the place of longing and the final bitterness of recognising (*álgos*) the situation in which we actually are. Yes, for a moment all is beautiful, but when the last sounds grow silent the dream comes to an end. Puddles outside the window are not Venetian canals.

4.

The more intensely I think about it the more often I experience a curious thought: perhaps Venice is present the most when it is not longer next to us. When it is not an object of direct perception, but emerges from *tempus praesens* and changes into the past tense. When it withdraws and becomes separated from us with an invisible windowpane. It settles down in dark niches of memory and waits, to return in a reminiscence, sometimes unexpected and puzzling, caused by a banal event such as an uneven pavement (the case of the narrator of *In Search of Lost Time*) or a familiar sequence of sounds. It is then that memory becomes a magnifying glass enlarging our emotions and imbues the phantom image with the density of a real vision. We see, therefore, a strangely clear image, a *sui generis* distillate, a world devoid of accidental additions characteristic for the "here and now" perception. This is an astonishing paradox: the unreal begins to exist more intensely than the real. It is the present that becomes illusion.

Venice, just as Nietzsche wished it to be, is music. But he forgot to add that it is also another name for nostalgia. A perfect synonym. Venice, the adopted homeland of many,⁵² is longing enclosed in stone. A longing for home, although

the latter is strange, stands on water, and everyone arranges it according to his wishes and expectations.

Here is a photograph taken probably in 1991. An October morning. A chill from the lagoon. The sky, all tattered shades of grey, resembles pigeon feathers. I sit at a table in Quadri, with my trousers rolled up, because the square is full of water. Venice is flooded, with water at knee level. Behind me, in blurred contours, a piano trio is playing. I keep hearing the same sounds, although indistinct. Something light, probably a café evergreen, some non-invasive waltz. The space next to the tables, which resemble moored boats, is almost empty. The music has totally dissolved itself in the humid air. This situation is somewhat absurd and inexpressibly beautiful. The musicians are playing for no one, or perhaps for the one who will evoke this

insignificant event sometime in the future, but neither they nor he know this. Right now, I am distant from that particular moment and myself. When I gaze at the past perfect – a balding, forty-five year old man⁵³ – I feel strange. The moment was luminescent but I experienced a lump in my throat. Actually, this is an appropriate reaction. Pursuing his hermeneutic of tears, composed of aphorisms, Emil Cioran defined Venice as *a town of tears caught between doubts and dreams*.⁵⁴

If I am not wrong, it is exactly such an ambivalent experience that Joseph Brodsky wrote about in the last passage of his *Watermark*, the most tender of all Venetian elegies on departure: *By rubbing water, this city improves time's looks, beautifies the future. That's what the role of this city in the universe is. Because the city is static while we are moving. The tear is proof of that. Because we go and beauty stays. Because we are headed for the future, while beauty is the eternal present. The tear is an attempt to remain, to stay behind, to merge with the city. But that's against the rules. The tear is a throwback, a tribute of the future to the past. Or else it is the result of subtracting the greater from the lesser: beauty from man. The same goes for love, because one's love, too, is greater than oneself*.⁵⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ H. James, *Venice. An Early Impression*, in: idem, *Italian Hours*, ed. with an introduction by J. Auchard, Pennsylvania State University, 1992, p. 53. A meticulous analysis of the image of Venice in texts by H. James in: T. Tanner, *Venice Desired*, Oxford 1992, pp.157-209.
- ² J. Brodsky, *Znak wodny*, transl. S. Barańczak, Kraków 1993, p. 61, 64-64.
- ³ E. Bieńkowska, *Co mówią kamienie Wenecji?*, Gdańsk 1999 (further as: CMKW).
- ⁴ The rhetoric of the descriptions of painting in this book is a topic for a separate sketch.
- ⁵ In order to become convinced it suffices to compare *Co mówią kamienie Wenecji?* with Joanna Pollakówna's *Weneckie tęsknoty*, whose major part also deals with Venetian painting. The difference is fundamental: Bieńkowska wrote about Venetian painting, but never neglected a wider perspective: intensive enrootment in an incomparable cultural-civilizational-aesthetic project that she considers Venice to have been. Pollakówna, on the other hand, is much closer to the standard narration of an historian of art following the biographical entanglements of painters and the aesthetic quality of described canvases. Cf. J. Pollakówna, *Weneckie tęsknoty. O malarstwie i malarzach Renesansu*, Warszawa 2003.
- ⁶ M. Merlau-Ponty, *Oko i umysł*, selected, prep. and introduction by S. Cichowicz, Gdańsk 1996, p. 27.
- ⁷ On such aspects of some of Giorgione's canvases – evading rational analysis – see: George Steiner: *I have already referred to the enigmas of silence in Giorgione, to Giorgione's ability to „paint silence”. I suspect that this particular gift relates closely to his renditions of duration, of suspended narrative. Where Giorgione's song and musical instruments are involved, the play of duration against time lies obviously to hand. But how can one account for the wonderfully translucent presence, vibrato of distinct, though related, gradations or planes of time in the painting known as*

- The Three Philosophers? By *what spiritual-technical means does Giorgione intimate the muted menace of worldly time, of time charged with incipient silence* so different from the pastoral-mythological irreversibility of time and the domination of the continuum in the background of *The Tempest?*, G. Steiner, *Gramatyki tworzenia*, transl. J. Łoziński, Poznań 2004, pp. 215-216.
- ⁸ On the still insufficiently recognised beginnings of Venice cf. G. Benzoni, *The Art of Venice and Its 'Forma Urbis'*, in: *Venice. Art & Architecture*, ed. G. Romanelli, Köln 1997, pp. 12-13; J. Morris, *The World of Venice*, New York 1988, pp. 17-20; W. Szyszkowski, *Wenecja. Dzieje Republiki 726-1797*, Toruń 1994, pp. 6-9.
- ⁹ G. Steiner, op. cit., p. 31.
- ¹⁰ H. G. Gadamer, *Aktualność piękna. Sztuka jako gra, symbol i święto*, transl. K. Krzemiń, Warszawa 1993, p. 43.
- ¹¹ At this stage I apply the concept introduced by Vladimir Toporov, who in his dazzling reconstruction of the image of St. Petersburg in Russian literature applied the term: "the St. Petersburg text" to designate all statements pertaining to the town. "*The Petersburg Text*" is not an ordinary mirror of the town, enhancing the effect. It is a construction with whose assistance one achieves a transition a realibus ad realiora, a transformation of material reality into spiritual values, cf. V. Toporov, *Idea petersburska w historii Rosji. Petersburg-Moskwa*, in: idem, *Miasto i mit*, selected, transl. and introduction by B. Żyłko, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 49-50. In the footnotes Toporov also mentioned the St. Petersburg-Venice parallel known in Russian literature.
- ¹² *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed. J. Murray, London 1896, p. 268.
- ¹³ M. Mc Carthy, *The Stones of Florence and Venice Observed*, London 1972, pp. 174-175.
- ¹⁴ R. Debray, *Contre Venise*, Paris 1995, p. 22.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 23.
- ¹⁶ S. Bayley, *Whose Venice do we want to preserve? And why, when*, "Independent", 14 April 2004.
- ¹⁷ Cf. F. T. Marinetti, *Against Past-Loving Venice*, in: idem, *Selected Writings*, London 1972.
- ¹⁸ S. Bayley, op. cit.
- ¹⁹ The original appeared in a periodical issued in Munich: *Der Kunstwart, Halbmonatsschau über Dichtung, Theater, Musik, bildende und angewandte Kunst*. Translation into the Polish in: G. Simmel, *Most i drzewi. Wybór esejów*, transl. M. Łukasiewicz, Warszawa 2006, pp. 177-183. Further as: MiD, with the page number.
- ²⁰ Cf. French edition: G. Simmel, *Rome, Florence, Venise*, transl. Ch. David, Paris 1998.
- ²¹ Lukacs described Simmel's miniatures of cities as excellent examples of "Impressionistic philosophy", i.e. a method in accordance with which the author attained the intended effect with several rapid movements of the pen; cf. Ch. David, *Notes sur l'impressionnisme philosophique de Georg Simmel*, in: Simmel, *Rome, Florence Venise*, p. 57.
- ²² The outlines of this dispute were skillfully reconstructed by, e.g. M. Rzepińska, *Historia koloru w dziejach malarstwa europejskiego*, Kraków 1983, second edition, pp. 272-289.
- ²³ M. McCarthy, op. cit., p. 174.
- ²⁴ P. van der Meer de Walcheren, *Dziennik nawróconego*, transl. Z. Starowiejska-Morstinowa, Kraków 1982, p. 61.
- ²⁵ G. Herling-Grudziński, *Dziennik pisany nocą 1973-1979*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 217-218.
- ²⁶ Y. Andrukhovych, *Perwersja*, transl. O. Hnatiuk and R. Rusnak, Wołowiec 2003, p. 59, 61 (here: transl. and introduction by Michael M. Naydan, Northwestern UP 2005, p. 52, 54). Further as: P together with page number.
- ²⁷ Mentioning the origin of the novel and difficulties with finding a suitable language Andrukhovych particularly underlined the enormity of Venetian logorrhoea: *During my first stay in Venice - in 1992, when I spent only 16 hours there - I promised myself that one day I shall write a Venetian novel. For many years I grappled, rejecting successive ideas and was terrified by the awareness that Venice has been the topic of quite a few novels. Who needs another one? Finally, I discovered a suitable form; Srebrny sygnet. Z Jurijem Andruchowyczem rozmawia Jan Strzałka*, "Tygodnik Powszechny", no. 32:2003.
- ²⁸ The words uttered by Perfetsky in the interview can be recognised as an expression of the convictions harboured by Andrukhovych: *Will there be a book about Venice? - That would really be a crazy idea! To write about Venice? Can you write anything else about Venice? After thousands upon thousands and thousands of the pages already written? No, I'm nobody's fool. Sorry.* [P, 244]
- ²⁹ The semantics of personal names in the novel as well as the extraordinary invention of Andrukhovych's terminology are material for a separate essay.
- ³⁰ Much seems to indicate that this concept, at first glance purely literary, was preceded by an original model. An opera by Harrison Birtwistle: *The Masks of Orpheus*, premiered in 1986. It took ten years to write and the author of the extremely bombastic, and pretentious libretto, convoluted to the limits of the absurd, was one Peter Zinovieff! It does not take much to see his reflection in Kulikoff and the paranoiac libretto of *Orpheus in Venice* as a parody of the irritating grandiloquence of *The Masks of Orpheus*. Competent commentaries by musicologists on the opera by Birtwistle-Zinovieff additionally confirm the above supposition: *This work represents the conception of the twentieth-century total theatre. (...) Zinovieff's libretto alone totals almost seventy pages and contains, alongside the main text of the three acts, a copious commentary by the author, a detailed description of the structure of the work, an explanation of the nature of the rites, a description of the stage design together with drawings, numerous tables showing the construction of the acts and scenes as well as an appendix containing the principles of the "Orphic language"*, cf. Z. Helman, *Metamorfozy mitu Orfeusza w muzyce scenicznej XX wieku*, in: *Mit Orfeusza. Inspiracje i reinterpretacje w europejskiej tradycji artystycznej*, ed. S. Żerańska-Kominek, Gdańsk 2003, pp. 292-293. This is a rather neutral description but already the author of a monograph about the musical transformations of the myth of Orpheus was less kind and wrote outright that Zinovieff's libretto read as a dramatic work *may seem pretentious as well as confused*, W. Mellers, *The Masks of Orpheus. Seven Stages in the Story of European Music*, Manchester 1987, p. 168.
- ³¹ This was the name granted to Venice by the historian W. H. McNeill, depicting the town on the lagoon as a centre in which Western culture met the Eastern element and a place where thoughts, ideas, commodities, etc. flowed in two directions across the centuries Cf. W. H. McNeill, *The Hinge of Europe, 1081-1797*, Chicago and London 1974.
- ³² A. Malczewski, *Pieśń masek*, in: *Maski*, selection, prep.

and ed. M. Janion and S. Rosiek, Gdańsk 1986, vol. 1, p. 7.

³³ Debray, op. cit., p. 11.

³⁴ By way of example: an almost bottomless treasury of secondary words, banalities, and obvious statements about Venice is Erika Jong's *Serenissima* (transl. E. Horodyska, Wrocław 1992). This book, supposedly admired by enthusiasts (although it is hard to believe this) looks like it was appears to be constructed according to a "do-it-yourself" kit supplied to the author; all the elements used to portray the town are ready-made. Here is a brief fragment from the very opening: *City of plagues and brief liaisons, city of lingering deaths and incendiary loves, city of chimeras, nightmares, pigeons, bells.* And so on, to the very end. Reading this book prior to becoming familiar with *Pervezion* is highly instructive and cognitively enriching. I guarantee that the fun will be even greater.

³⁵ A. Tarkowski, *Scenariusze*, vol. II, Warszawa 1998, pp.103-104.

³⁶ Tarkovsky's notes in his *Diaries*, dating from the time he was working on the film, make it possible to propose a rather trivial but probable reason: money. A considerable part of the notes, apart from remarks about the progress made on the screenplay, also describes the struggle waged by both authors – Tarkovsky and Tonino Guerra – to obtain funds, the necessity of eliminating certain scenes from the film or their reduction, etc. Cf. A. Tarkowski, *Dzienniki*, transl. and prep. S. Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1998, pp. 190-276.

³⁷ A. Tarkowski, *Scenariusze*, p. 104.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁹ L. Batkin, *Czym jest nostalgia?*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 9-10:1995, p. 212.

⁴⁰ Z. Benedyktowicz, *Powrót do domu. Tarkowski i Kantor*, "Konteksty" no. 2:2008, pp.14-27.

⁴¹ Listen to this quartet in a unique performance by the Belcea Quartet (B. Britten, *String Quartets 1,2&3, 3 Divertimenti*, EMI 7243 5 59768 2, 2005)

⁴² F. Nietzsche, *Ecce homo. Jak się stawiamy tym, czym jesteśmy*, Kraków 2002, p. 59.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ph. Sollers, *Dictionnaire amoureux de Venise*, Paris 2004, p. 460.

⁴⁵ The intuitions of Bohdan Pocij about the *Adagietto* contain an even more apt reflection on the merge of the introduction from *Death in Venice* and the accompanying sound: *In this scene the entire epic-dramatic symphonic quality is supplanted by the pure expression of beauty suffused with love. Here music and its melodic speech are governed (...) by the fluid rhythm of emotion, a delicately swaying movement ceased by a sigh and swelling with intense longing for completeness. This is an expressive mirage of happiness, painful due to its elusiveness*, B. Pocij, *Szkice z późnego romantyzmu*, Kraków 1978, pp. 121-122.

⁴⁶ Uri Caine Ensemble, *Wagner e Venezia* (Winter&Winter 910 013-2, 1997).

⁴⁷ Since in *The Venice Text* everything is connected, it seems suitable to mention upon this occasion that the book: *Co mówią kamienie Wenecji* (see: chapter I) begins with a comparison of the view of the town with reality, and the gaze of the tourist is focused on San Giorgio, in turn, the conference about the post-carnival nonsense of the world (see: chapter III) takes place on the same island...

⁴⁸ R. Wagner, *Mein leben*, Munchen 1911, vol. II, p. 684.

⁴⁹ J. J. Norwich, *Paradise of Cities. Venice and Its Nineteenth-century Visitors*, London 2003, p. 141.

⁵⁰ Caine treated in a similar way - and with an equally excellent outcome - music by Mahler, cf. Gustaw Mahler/Uri Caine, *Primal light* (Winter&Winter, 910 004-2, 1997). Admittedly, the method applied in both recordings did not always pass the test, for instance, in Bach's *The Goldberg Variations* (Winter&Winter, 910 054-2, 2000); here, Caine's reconstructions proved totally unconvincing.

⁵¹ Cf. M. Zwerin, *An 'interpretive musicologist' takes on Mahler. Uri Caine, the classical jazzman*, "International Herald Tribune", 13 February 2002.

⁵² Simmel was so wrong to write with distaste: *although our soul can thus find in Venice an adventure, it cannot build a home*, Simmel, *Most i drzwi*, p. 183.

⁵³ Actually, 47 years old, but as we know one should never interfere with quotations!

⁵⁴ E. Cioran, *Święci i łzy*, transl. and preface by I. Kania, Warszawa 2003, p. 140.

⁵⁵ J. Brodski, *Znak wodny*, transl. S. Barańczak, Kraków 1993, p. 105.

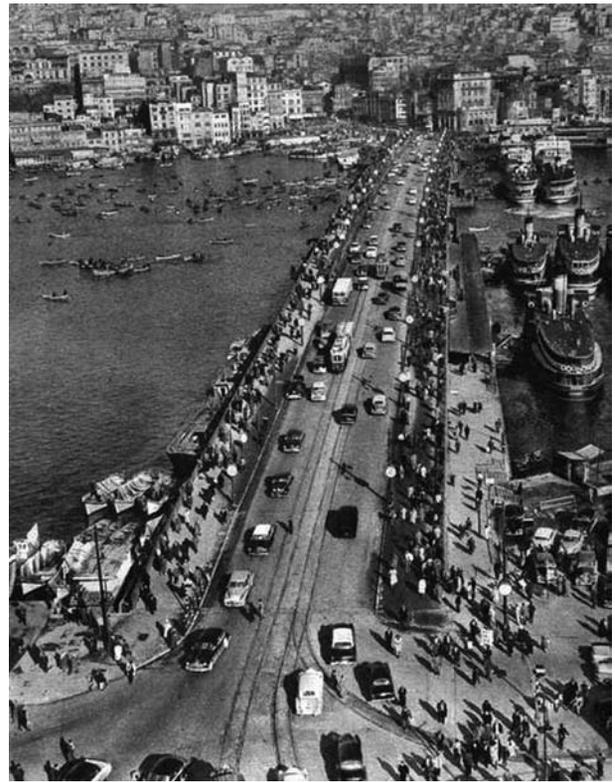


Istanbul: Recollections from a Lost City

I sometimes think myself unlucky to have been born in an aging and impoverished city buried under the ashes of a ruined empire.

In his autobiographical intimate novel: *Istanbul - Memories and the City*¹ Orhan Pamuk embarked upon an imposing challenge: to capture the essence of the town in which he grew up and to which he tried throughout his whole life to return by resorting to snatches of texts, scraps of newspapers, fragments of images, and reminiscences of scents. This effort of recollecting Istanbul as seen by the later Nobel Prize laureate in the course of the first 22 years of his life – the period embraced by the narration - appears to be hazardous. Pamuk endeavoured to recreate, evoke, and present to the reader a city no longer existent, unrecognisable in its present-day shape, and undecipherable on a contemporary map. We thus received a paradoxical apology, a hymn in honour of a remembered and imaginary location – a phantom cosmopolitan Istanbul, deteriorating but still capable of casting a spell with its Oriental allure. A brief demographic outline of the town on the Bosphorus enables us to envisage the scale of changes; in the 1920s it had a population of 500 000, which during Pamuk's childhood totalled a million, and in 2000 – 10 million.² Today, the cypress-covered hills viewed by the young Orhan have vanished under cheap housing estates, bridges cross the Bosphorus, and the favourite promenade of the Pamuk family had been taken over by tourists.

Those readers who expect *Istanbul* to be a city guidebook endowed with an aura of the belles lettres and enhanced with spicy local details will be disappointed: the peregrination routes bypass easily identifiable spots and Istanbul icons (perhaps with the sole exception of the Galata Bridge linking the banks of the Golden Horn). They lead us down the kempt streets of the wealthiest districts, joining assorted points of Pamuk's private topography: the family house in Nişantaş, the "Little Paris" of Istanbul,³ and an apartment in another Europeanised district, i.e. Cihangir. From here we make



Galata Bridge. 1950s
Source: www.azizistanbul.com

our way to the American Robert College and eventually reach the vestibule of the Hilton Hotel, in which friends of the author's father took their afternoon tea. If we should decide to travel to the Bosphorus then only in a 1952 Dodge so as to catch a boat already waiting to take the Pamuk family to a summer residence on the largest of the Prince islands. When he managed – escaping the prying gaze of his mother and omniscient aunts – to find himself with his first girlfriend in the poor Greek districts of Fener or Balat, the local urchins would run at the sight of the lovers trying to hide, crying: *Tourist! Tourist! What is your name?*

I recall this caricature not in order to discredit Pamuk's portrayal – *Istanbul* is an in-depth, dense, and multi-strata description endowed with poetic ambiance and sarcastic self-deprecation. Reading the recollections of the Nobel Prize laureate calls, however, for critical awareness making it possible to decipher his text in the most complete way possible – the author himself appears to encourage us to do so by carefully outlining the novel's socio-cultural backdrop.

This is a manifesto of the identity of a native-born resident of Istanbul, an apology of enrootment and affiliation to a town whose greatest force is duration and continuity; it is those features that discourses competing with Pamuk – especially nationalistic and anti-Western ones – would like to obliterate. On almost every page of his book the author stressed his alienness and "foreignness" in new Istanbul - this is not a Baedeker travel guide but the narration of an egocentric and introvert

man of letters who devoted long years to arrive at the by no means simple essence of the city and to become capable of consciously identifying himself with its sublime depiction. To be able to say: *Istanbul's fate is my fate: I am attached to this city because it has made me who I am.*

Between the East and the West: melancholic Istanbul

In a justification of their verdict, members of the Royal Swedish Academy explained that they presented the award to a writer *who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures.*⁴ Despite the fact that he evaded the well-worn metaphor of the bridge linking the Orient and the Occident Pamuk did not resign from exploring the potential of this fundamental opposition. Nonetheless, he sought regions where the terms “East” and “West” still mean something, say something essential, and explain the condition of people from the world around him: suspended, torn between extremities, unable to fully identify themselves either with one circle or the other.⁵ Benefitting from Orientalist clichés, stereotype depictions, and simple connotations with which sentimental descriptions of Constantinople abounded, Pamuk tried to reach that level of experiencing the city along which there takes place a profound identification with the site, its texts and imagery due to the absorption, personal interpretations or rejection of existing representations. This is a difficult and painful identification, marked with a feeling of shame and uncertainty, loss and paradoxical pride.

Return for a moment to the social context: the Pamuk family inherited a fortune made by the author's grandfather who built railroads during the first years of the Republic,⁶ and which Orhan's father and uncles managed to squander in the post-war period. The author's relatives can be regarded as a model-like sample of the Istanbul Europeanised elite – educated at the best universities, ostentatiously lay, and associated with the cosmopolitan legacy of the town rather than with the nationalistic project of modern Turkish identity. Torn by inner conflicts, lost in the elegant interiors of their Istanbul apartment, surrounded by piles of Western books gathering dust, and with difficulty finding their place in the new social and cultural reality of the Republic. *Home became as empty as the city's ruined yalis⁷ and as gloomy as the fern-darkened gardens surrounding them* - Pamuk recalled; elsewhere, he supplemented the image of the catastrophe approaching those closest to him and the town: *...but as nothing, Western or local, came to fill the void, the great drive to Westernise amounted mostly to the erasure of the past; the effect on culture was reductive or stunting, leaving families like mine, otherwise glad of Republican progress, to furnish their houses like museums.*⁸ Pamuk seems to suggest that the degeneration of people is merely a reflection and derivative of the

ruin into which the town declined. Times of splendour had passed, and streets and houses together with their residents were doomed to exist on the margin of great history.

We arrive at the point in which Pamuk's Istanbul begins to slowly disclose its true face – that of a town relegated to the peripheries, forgotten, and full of traces of dead imperial culture gradually ousted by the mediocrity of modernity. It is here, amidst the ruins and snatches of former might, that the author sought anchorage points. Pamuk described the feeling accompanying this difficult identification as *hüzün* – he had in mind specific melancholy characteristic for the residents of Istanbul, embedded in an overwhelming feeling of loss and decline, additionally supplemented with recollections of imperial glory and poisoned by the irreversibility of the changes to which the town had succumbed.⁹

Already due to its Arabian etymology *hüzün* refers to Koranic and Sufi tradition ousted in republican Turkey,¹⁰ to the era of spiritual death and philosophical sophistication: contemporaneity appears to be their failed and ungrateful child. This paradoxical feeling – sorrow mixed with pride, and reminiscences of greatness with the experiences of degeneration, a subconscious willingness to undergo suffering - becomes the content of Istanbul existence. Searching for a counterpart of this *par excellence* local state of the spirit Pamuk turns to the outside, towards analogues of urban sadness recorded in the writings of Western authors. In its capacity as individual suffering, leading towards alienness and loneliness, Romantic European melancholy does not, however, exhaust the nature of the phenomenon, which in its Istanbul edition is a shared feeling and possibly the sole experience linking all those who manage to identify themselves with the city on the Bosphorus. Understanding *hüzün* could be facilitated by reading *Tristes Tropiques* by Claude Lévi-Strauss, although this *tristesse* too will not be an exact reflection of Istanbul sorrow; depression accompanying the observation of the poverty of São Paulo or Delhi has an underpinning of a colonial feeling of guilt, of which Pamuk's kinsmen are free. Perhaps its identification is better assisted by the symptoms of the Istanbul malaise and not its sources: *It is by seeing hüzün, by paying our respects to its manifestations in the city's streets and views and people, that we at last come to sense it everywhere. On cold winter mornings, when the sun suddenly falls on the Bosphorus and that faint vapour begins to rise from the surface.*

Pamuk perceived the mark of sadness unmistakably in the remnants of former Constantinople - immersed in the tissue of the city and with time losing their integral character vanishing amidst the successive strata of the Istanbul palimpsest of the ruins of previous towns.¹¹ It is on their rubble and in the gaps in their tissue that successive forms developed, creating hybrid spaces dif-

difficult to decipher. In order to explain the special enthralling and attractive nature of those Istanbul strata Pamuk rather provocatively referred to the category of the “picturesque” conceived by John Ruskin, so as to in a thoroughly nineteenth-century and Romantic style express every few pages his admiration for a Byzantine wall overgrown with ivy or a semi-buckled mossy roof of a *tekke* belonging to crazed dervishes, whose garden provides shelter for homeless dogs - the emblematic residents of a town abandoned by successive civilisations.

The sorrow that is part of the essence of the locality is projected onto its image: in its purest and correct form Istanbul will appear to Pamuk as black-and-white. The scarlet and orange of the sultanate, Muslim green banners and turquoise robes have already faded, leaving *the city of ruins and of end-of-the-empire melancholy*. The greying and rotting timber of the collapsing Ottoman villas,¹² the ashen, indescribable fur of dogs roaming in the streets, the severity of stone mosques marking the town panorama, the threads of thick smoke spewed by ships sailing across the sound, the dark whirl of the water surrounding and invading the town. Finally, the most important component of the Bosphorus monochrome: snow. Pamuk constructed his Istanbul from such images and it is they that condense most effectively the very essence of post-imperial colourlessness. Once again, and as in the case of the *hüzün*, despite the feeling of loss and an awareness of the ostensibly unattractive colour scale of the city, it is this black-and-white quality that for Pamuk will render Istanbul his town.

Hence, melancholy and ruins, black, grey and white, unclear memories of former opulence and quiet consent to the local peripheral character.¹³ By embarking upon a quasi-Orientalist game played both with the texts describing the town and with the reader, the author continued to circulate around “dangerous” motifs: clichés of Oriental harems and cemeteries, mysterious murders committed by moonlight or Romantic images of “beautiful ruins”. He provocatively resorted to texts from the “black list” of Western writers-Orientalists, laboriously disclosed by Edward Said and his emulators¹⁴ – descriptions of Istanbul by Nerval, Gautier, and Flaubert become the keys to the gates of a non-existent town. This is a step just as effective as it is hazardous: Pamuk’s book thus becomes an easy target both for the pro-revision numerous trackers of Orientalist deviations on the Western side of the barricade (who, in turn, accuse him of copying Western clichés and the “Orientalisation” of Istanbul) and the Turks, readily criticising Pamuk for his “Occidentalisation” of the town, contrary to the national ethos, for pandering to European tastes, and for failing to notice the “genuine”, Moslem and, predominantly, Turkish character of the metropolis.¹⁵

Defending his stand, Pamuk developed a unique theory of the Istanbul amalgamate, in which elements

borrowed from Eastern and Western tradition create a difficult and ambiguous whole. Although this rather unsurprising apology of syncretism and multicultural qualities resounds with truism (could the identity of a town with a population totalling more the 10 million be based on a single tradition?) in *Istanbul* it is constructed in an interesting fashion: *via* a multi-strata criticism of the *cul de sac* into which fascination with figures of the East and the West has led the residents of Istanbul. Openly critical of Turkish nationalism,¹⁶ Pamuk seems to parallelly – although somewhat more gently – doubt the tendency to copy Western models (and turned the edge of irony predominantly towards his relatives, thus revealing the cultural shallows, on which they have landed). A search for references to Islam will not lead us far while reading *Istanbul*: attachment to religion is, according to Pamuk, a feature typical for the “primitive” residents of the poor districts, arrivals from the Anatolian province, while the author’s direct contact with the Moslem ritual seems to be limited to spying upon and tormenting a female servant employed by his parents when he was a child. The poor and those mistreated by fate “need” God, but this certainly does not hold true for Pamuk. If one were to seek the positive aspects of the Istanbul mixture, the writer would have probably assigned them to the cosmopolitanism of the town, its multicultural qualities inscribed into the history of a city for centuries populated by Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians and representatives of other diasporas. Here too, however, *hüzün* makes itself known – due to brutal nationalisation and successive pogroms little is left of former great variety: at best, memory and consecutive traces marking the map of the town, a phantom of the past.

Istanbul identity *à la* Orhan Pamuk is undoubtedly exclusive and elitist – hence the majority of the critical opinions about his literary commentaries voiced in Turkey.¹⁷ Significantly, the author too described his position as ambiguous, stressing that his prime intention was writing books and not politics, that he was unafraid of formulating strong opinions about the cultural rank of the country. His voice, one of few, is heard and carefully heeded on the western shores of the Bosphorus. *Istanbul* is predominantly a literary text; more, it is an urban mega-text, involving earlier descriptions into a dialogue.

Istanbul in a text

Sometimes, it might appear that Pamuk owes more to his literary predecessors than to an actual experience of the town. The Istanbul *Bildungsroman* is, after all, primarily the story of taming space *via* text, of becoming old enough for Istanbul (and *Istanbul!*) by delving into its successive representations. Here, the author rendered the reader’s task easier and this one time did not compel him to participate in a game: without conceal-

ing the sources of his inspirations he openly indicated which texts moulded his image of the town (we must forgive a megalomaniac inclination to regard himself as an equal of the greatest - sometime Mann, at other times Conrad or Nabokov). More, he patiently guides the reader across his textual *silva verborum* comprising an unobvious likeness of the town on the Bosphorus.

If the most sensitive chords of the Istanbul spirit are affected by the West-East dichotomy then the same holds true for texts that enabled Pamuk to reach the very essence of the town: famous Orientalists, on the one hand, and local writers, forgotten by the Turks (who was supposed to read them?), on the other hand. Hence Nerval and his *Voyage en Orient*, in which Istanbul, rather colourless in comparison with Cairo, is one of the last stopovers; then, following Nerval's tracks, Gautier and his *Constantinople*; finally, Flaubert suffering from syphilis caught in Beirut and, similarly as Nerval, disappointed with the "insufficiently Oriental" Constantinople. Further on, Gide, unsparing in his racist comments about the natives, and Le Corbusier, under the spell of the Ottoman legacy (he toured the town prior to his fascination with the aesthetics of the limousine and the transatlantic liner; more, in a bout of Orientalist nostalgia he was wont to urge the Turkish modernisers to preserve and revitalise historical wooden architecture!¹⁸). Pamuk read them patiently and indulgently – at times expressing irony for the schematic depictions, upon other occasions seeking in their descriptions details to which none of the earlier examined texts drew attention. In a word: he allowed the Europeans to tell a story about *their* Istanbul, regardless of the character of those accounts.

The whole issue grows more complicated when we examine the local dragomans, with Pamuk devoting more attention to four of them: Resat Ekrem Koçu, Yahya Kemal, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar and Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar, Istanbul guides described by the author as melancholic men of letters. What is the crux of the matter? Apparently, these four writers, at least when read by Pamuk, managed to penetrate the town the most, to salvage the majority of Istanbul in their texts, to best render its specificity lost in time. Koçu – the Sisyphus of the Bosphorus – devoted his whole life to a deed that cannot be rivalled: *Istanbul Encyclopedia* (keep in mind that while collecting material for this perverse compendium he devoted himself to studying the special beauty of the local boys, leaving the town and its description on the margin), Kemal - whose poetry is up to this day used to educate consecutive generations of Turks, and Tanpınar, closest to the Nobel Prize laureate: master and student. Both spent their youth becoming familiar with Armenian poetry and devoted their mature years to delving into the language of Western poets and parallel roaming across the poor suburbs, where they discovered a foretaste of the desired *hüzün*. Finally, there

is Hisar, whose "Bosphorus civilization" remained for Pamuk a model of the Istanbul saga: the fate of people and the town constitute a tangle not to be unravelled.

Where are the complications? - asks the more observant reader. It appears that within the context of the four writers there recurs the melancholy echo of an unavoidable complexity of the identity of the town on the Bosphorus – the already familiar East-West paradox. All four enjoy the deserved renown of "great Turkish writers" (perhaps with the sole exception of the rather too controversial Resat Ekrem Koçu), and all four developed their talent and perception in contact, context, and deep fascination with Western literature – either imitating European models or trying to translate and adapt them to local reality. Pamuk is uncompromising in his assessment: he hears clearly the Western semitone even in the "native" representations of Istanbul, closest to virtuosity; the "purity" of description and innocence so desired by nationalists and Turkish purists, its independence from European impact are simply impossible. We reach a successive essential and sensitive point of the arguments presented by the Nobel Prize laureate: the inevitability of borrowing, whose source is both the centuries-long fascination with the West and a *sui generis* impotence of Turkish authors incapable of describing their town. *Leaving aside various official documents and the handful of city columnists who scolded Istanbul for their poor comportment in the streets, until the beginning of the twentieth century, Istanbul themselves wrote very little about their city. The living, breathing city – its streets, its atmosphere, its smells, the rich variety of its everyday life was penned by Westerners – a harsh opinion formulated in a characteristically Orhan Pamuk style.*

Whoever would like to make a riposte to this critique by referring to Said's theory of Orientalism, arguing that the Turks simply had no other solution at their disposal than to succumb to the cultural and political domination of the West, cannot expect to enjoy easy success. Only awareness of the complexity of the Turkish paradox, that East-West angle characteristic for contemporary Turkey, makes it possible, Pamuk claims, to perceive the reverse side of the issue. *Orientalism* is interpreted in Istanbul, unfortunately, mainly *to justify nationalist sentiment or to imply that, if it weren't for the West, the East would be a wonderful place* - and Pamuk seems to be correct within the context of the identity disputes conducted from the onset of the Republic.

Album

The author reads about Istanbul, but just as often observes it by seeking its soul and the recognisable face of the town in books, etchings, and sketches. Already browsing through his book makes it possible to imagine the way in which Pamuk sees the space of the metropolis: obsessively recurring images of decrepit wooden villas, the *yalı* along the Bosphorus, views of streets

sprinkled with snow, photographs of the Galata Bridge and ships trying to squeeze into the Golden Horn ports, and, finally, the nineteenth-century etchings by Melling, a favourite illustrator and another European who managed to portray the town better than the local artists. The secret of the force of Melling's compositions is supposed to be concealed in the specifically "humble perspective" assumed by him: the absence of a central point, the distance from which he looks at a panorama, and the emptiness and life granted to elements placed in the frame - all those features bring his way of seeing closer to Pamuk's perception and enable the Nobel Prize laureate to discover in the archaic etchings the shadow of *hüzün*. One more thing that cannot be overlooked: the affiliation supposedly linking Melling with the Ottoman authors of miniatures ready to resign from faithful depiction for the sake of representation concurrent with the canon and subjugating details of the "human" world to strict rules of composition (on the margin: the same principle appears to be applied in Pamuk's text). Yet another person suspended "between" and non-identifiable either with the imaginary East or the West.

The second protagonist of the visual novel and a great illustrator of the town is Ara Güler¹⁹ - a reporter prowling the dark and narrow streets and registering the grim face of Istanbul at the time of Pamuk's childhood. His photographs are supposed to express the writer's favourite black-and-white image of the town: street scenes that could appear to be portrayed by sheer accident, blurred takes of dubious lanes at twilight, pedestrians captured as they hurry along day after day, and, finally, scores of photographs documenting the no longer existing Istanbul with its wooden villas and cobblestones. At first glance, this is an accidental collection or rather one that illustrates the text in a somewhat excessively literal way. Nevertheless, it remains valuable because it enabled Pamuk to descend into the street, to leave for a while the drowsy cosiness of his studio with a view of the Bosphorus, and to pretend that he too manages to traverse the town and not only imagines it upon the basis of depictions by others.

Finally, private photographs - *Istanbul* is, after all, also a parallel family saga with the town as its backdrop, and the lead protagonists - Orhan, growing up, his brother, who gives him an undeserved bashing, their beautiful mother, the permanently absent dandy-father and the majestic grandmother. Let us add, that this is the Orhan who planned to devote himself to painting and spent several years of volatile adolescence sketching the same panorama of the Bosphorus and *personifying* successive European painters so as to attain that special, dual, Eastern-Western acuity. Once again, an ostensible secondariness or perhaps more exactly: a twisting path leading through the stage of emulating the Orientalist clichés of old Constantinople and towards intentional identification with the town and its image.

Intimate town, absent town

The autobiographical convention observes its own rules: there is place for slight exhibitionism and the generalisation of one's condition, and a wide field for manoeuvre for the sake of auteur self-creation as long as the writer is capable of connecting successive motifs into a whole as cohesive as possible. Pamuk made copious use of these possibilities: poignant photographs of the four-year old pouting Orhan next to Orhan-the intellectual involved in politics, showing off his erudition. Self-deprecatory confessions about the excesses of first love lead smoothly towards stories about the ruins of the poor districts and their nineteenth-century descriptions.

In time, the ostensibly chaotic narration (the chronology of the autobiographical novel is disturbed by successive, supposedly haphazard inserts) produced an order of sorts: *Istanbul* registers the process of reaching an awareness of being-in-a-city, documenting its consecutive stages together with all the complications encountered along the way. The path splits into at least three tracks: the text, the image, and life; choosing only a single one leads astray, and ignoring one of them could result in incomplete, fragmentary identification. In other words, there are three domains in which Pamuk seeks his town, and further: three chronological stages of growing up. Childhood appears to be a time of an unthinking, unruffled absorption of space (careless rides in a 1952 Dodge, dancing on the pavement so as to miss the cracks and "dangerous" joints, reading shop signs, announcements and neon lights), while adolescence is a time of rejecting the simple image of the town. The exalted *quasi-flâneurisme*²⁰ of this period led Pamuk towards dark bars suffused with cigarette smoke, clamorous meetings of leftists, and the dirty back stage of the suburbs that merely enhance inner frustration. Finally, the last step: overcoming inner rebellion and the joy of identifying oneself with the community of the residents of Istanbul - mournful in a manner shared by the author, melancholic just like him, and longing for a lost town. The epilogue: the outcome of this reunification with people and place, willingness and readiness to create one's own intimate urban text that would reflect all three fundamental components: life, image, and literature.

Pamuk experienced his *catharsis* (where else?) on a ferry sailing between the Golden Horn ports, among *tired fellow passengers with their dull coats, their skullcaps,*²¹ *their scarves and their string bags* - amidst the symbolic Others of *his Istanbul*.²² Among all these ordinary, common people, whom he saw in photographs by Ara Güler more frequently than in the familiar streets of the Europeanised quarters; people sharing with their numerous children cramped wooden houses on the brink of collapse in historical suburbs evoking the author's nostalgia. Amidst those millions coming to *his*

town who desecrated hills overgrown with cypresses and covered them with *hideous new concrete apartment buildings (each one crushing my soul)*. To what degree are these words full of elitist arrogance insufferable for the Turkish readers, how much do they carry of intentionally created contrast intent on making the reader once again aware of the nature of the Istanbul *hüzün*?

Finally, one last paradox: while declaring his readiness to describe the melancholic spirit of the town, supposedly unconsciously experienced by all the “locals”, Pamuk wrote a magnificent literary document of the bright sides of the specifically Istanbul version of exclusion. If one were to follow on the map the routes of his excursions, the majority of the districts will remain blanks,²³ while those mentioned will correspond to the Europeanised exclusive parts of the town, inhabited by local men of means. The Nobel laureate presents himself as a “native” writing about his town as an insider, but a few pages later on he mentions the feeling of alienation and deprivation of roots experienced while strolling in the streets. We can try to decipher the same ostensible contradiction within the context of the social background against which Pamuk placed himself: writing about the town of old he had in mind a town from an era when the feeling of a loss (post-imperial nostalgia experienced while looking at picturesque ruins) was compensated by an awareness of possession (of social prestige, cultural superiority, economic hinterland). In his words: [...] *later on, [in the 1960s and 1970s – J. Ch.] when Turkey’s democracy had matured somewhat and rich provincials began flocking to Istanbul to present themselves to “society”; by then, my father’s and my uncle’s business failures had taken their toll, subjecting us to the indignity of being outclassed by people who had no taste for secularism and no understanding for western culture. If enlightenment entitled us to riches and privilege, how were we to explain to those pious parvenus that we deserved them? Perhaps by resorting to a text?*

On the one hand, *Istanbul* is a story about an intimate, personal growing up of an egocentric man of letters, sensitive to beauty; on the other hand, and in a much less obvious manner, it is a narration about the gradual relegation of the old Istanbul (the town of Pamuk *et consortes*) by the new Istanbul, desultory, un-aesthetic and not worth our attention: the “common” and “uncivilised” Istanbul of immigrants from the provinces. The latter are absent in the book, and we may at best notice the shadow they cast on the idealised vision cherished by the Nobel laureate, causing him to become enveloped by *the darkest, most murderous and authentic strain of melancholy*.

The incompatibility of the map sketched by the writer and the actual dynamic of the town should not come as a surprise – this is the consequence of a project realised with sensitivity and piety, intent on reviving in the text a remembered and perhaps slightly mytholo-

gised space, certainly one without any claims to objectivism. *For everything we say about the city’s essence says more about our own lives and our own state of mind. The city has no centre other than ourselves*, Pamuk explained his powers of observation. Let this be – as long as such non-symmetrical, subjectivised, and intimate attempts remain excellent literature capable of enchanting some and inclining others towards a more profound reflection on the political-cultural theses of the author. In the case of Orhan Pamuk this manner of conducting a narration is sometimes more successful than an amassment of fictional plots.

Endnotes

- ¹ O. Pamuk, *Stambul. Wspomnienia i miasto*, translated A. Polat, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2008. The numbers of the pages in parentheses after the quotations refer to this edition.
- ² Already in 2008 the number of the town inhabitants was estimated at 12,5 million. On the Istanbul demographic boom in recent years cf., i.a. A. Aksoy, *Istanbul’s Choice*, “Third Text” no. 1 (22) 2008, pp. 71-83. It is worth noting that the total of residents rapidly growing since 1950 up to this day is predominantly the outcome of inner migration – successive tides of arrivals from the provinces settling down in Istanbul.
- ³ I mention the names of Istanbul districts, probably of little significance for the Polish reader, in order to outline the “elitist map” of the town – these areas are culturally reserved for the Europeanised upper strata and access is hampered for the average inhabitants of Istanbul by the economic barrier. On the ethnic-cultural character of the historical districts of Istanbul cf. Z. Çelik, *An Architectural Survey of the City*, in: *The Remaking of Istanbul. Portrait of an Ottoman City in 19th Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1993, p. 9 and 21 sqq.
- ⁴ . The complete text of the justification of the verdict, the speech given by Orhan Pamuk at the ceremony of presenting the 2006 Nobel Prize in literature, and details concerning the writer’s biography and bibliography in: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2006/ (access 10.01.2009).
- ⁵ Another line of division appears to be much more significant within the context of Istanbul: I have in mind the north-south line. The Pamuk family is an excellent representative of the “northern Istanbul residents”, a Europeanised and lay middle class living in districts to the north of the Golden Horn – the first beneficiaries of modernisation, in time relegated to the economic and cultural margin. On this division cf. O. Esen, *The Tightrope Walk of the Middle Class in a Fractured Istanbul*, in: *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World. Writings from the 9th International Istanbul Biennial*, İstanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, İstanbul 2005, pp. 120-121. Pamuk described the experience of crossing the border of the Golden Horn: *The trams had been going up and down our street since 1914 connecting [northern districts - J. Ch.] Maçka and Nişantaşı to Taksim Square, Tünel, the Galat Bridge and all the other poor, old historic [southern – J. Ch.] neighbourhoods that then seemed to belong to another country* (p. 50).
- ⁶ On the ideological and non-neutral significance of railway lines linking the most distant parts of Anatolia and

- the cultural centre (Istanbul) and political capital (Ankara) for the Turkish project of modernism see: S. Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building. Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London 2001, pp. 119-121. Involvement in building the railroad turned Paul's grandfather into a classic representative of the elite of modernisers, who by imposing reforms intended to transform the crumbling empire into a Western-type state.
- ⁷ *Yalı* describes a seaside villa, typical for Ottoman housing in Istanbul, situated on the shores of the Bosphorus and "opened" towards the straits and not the town.
- ⁸ Nationalistic reforms introduced in the 1930s by the iron-fisted Atatürk and his adherents resulted in an effective severance of the cultural continuum between Ottoman and republican Turkey: a change of the Ottoman alphabet to a Latin one and the Muslim calendar to a Gregorian one, a reform of clothes, a secularisation campaign as well as a transference of the capital of the state from sultanate-era Istanbul to historically neutral Ankara were only some of the bold modernisation steps taken to transform Turkey from the "sick man of Europe" into a modern republic. Cf. D. Kołodziejczyk *Turcja. Historia państw świata XX wieku*, Wyd. Trio, Warszawa 2000, pp. 114-127.
- ⁹ An attempted analysis of the category of melancholy in Pamuk's Istanbul by, i.a. Esra Akcan, cf. *The Melancholies of Istanbul*, "World Literature Today", 11-12 2006, pp. 39-43.
- ¹⁰ Abandoned ruins of Moslem brotherhoods (banned in 1925 upon the order of Atatürk), a constantly recurring motif in Istanbul, symbolized the religious sophistication of the Ottoman era but at the time of the young Pamuk were merely mute symbols of the fall and degeneration of a past civilisation.
- ¹¹ On the Istanbul palimpsest cf. A. Nowaczewski, *Pejzaże miejskiej melancholii*, "Przegląd polityczny" no. 89, 2008, p. 59.
- ¹² Orhan Esen identified Pamuk's favourite motif of a wooden crumbling house, characteristic for the poor districts of Istanbul, with unkempt children reclining on the steps and laundry drying in the windows, as a symbol of backwardness and Oriental poverty contested by adherents of the modernisation of Turkey; cf. O. Esen, *Learning from Istanbul*, in: *Self-Service City: Istanbul*, ed. O. Esen, S. Lanz, b-books, Berlin 2007, fragment available on: <http://www.metrozones.info/istanbul/index.html> (access 15 January 2009). In recent years, successive quarters dominated by such housing, e.g. the Fatih district mentioned by Pamuk, have been torn down.
- ¹³ Cf. Pamuk's reflections about the marginal and indirect status of Turkey in the interview: *Nadal naiwnie wierzę w Zachód*, Magazyn "Dziennika", 25-26 October 2008, pp. 7-8. The author devoted much attention to this motif also in his Nobel lecture: *My Father's Suitcase*, "Przegląd polityczny" no. 89: 2008, (insert).
- ¹⁴ Cf. E. W. Said, *Orientalizm*, transl. M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2005, in particular pp. 284-354.
- ¹⁵ The motif of the collision of Eastern and Western impacts is one of the *leitmotifs* of Pamuk's works. In: *My Name is Red (Nazywam się Czerwien*, transl. D. Chmielewska, Wyd. Literackie, Kraków 2007) it is included within the context of a dispute concerning style and authorship conducted by sixteenth-century painters of miniatures active in the sultanate; in *Snow (Snieg*, transl. A. Polat, Wyd. Literackie, Kraków 2006) this tension is expressed in a political and world outlook controversy, thus becoming a direct reason for disturbances in the provincial town of Kars.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Nadal naiwnie wierzę w Zachód*, Magazyn "Dziennika", 25-26 October 2008, pp. 7-8 and *Moja turecka biblioteka*, "Dziennik", 24 December 2008.
- ¹⁷ Cf. S. Morkoç, *City and Self in Three Accounts of Istanbul: Lorich's Panorama (1559), Le Corbusier's Travelogue (1911) and Pamuk's Memoir (2005)*, "Middle East Technical University Journal of the Faculty of Architecture" no. 2 (24) 2007, pp. 96-97.
- ¹⁸ On the Istanbul (unrealised) projects by Le Corbusier see: S. Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building. Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic*, University of Washington Press, Seattle and London 2001, pp. 3-4 and 67.
- ¹⁹ Born in 1928 in an Armenian family, probably the most famous Turkish photojournalist and the only Turk working for the Magnum agency. Photographs taken in the 1950s and 1960s, showing the fishermen and workers of Istanbul, attained the status of urban icons. In his book Pamuk included chiefly street photographs by Güler.
- ²⁰ *The impossibility of the emergence of flâneurisme à la Turca* was interestingly described by Uğur Tanyeli: due to the obliteration of the public/private borderline functioning in Western towns, in Turkey streets became an arena of intensive social control making it impossible to unrestrictedly roam other than in groups. Tanyeli pointed out that outer space assumed the form of places of *meetings and interactions* and not of the *isolation* of the individualised subject. Cf. U. Tangelo, *Public Space/Private Space: The Invention of a Conceptual Dichotomy in Turkey*, in: *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World. Writings from the 9th International Istanbul Biennial*, Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfı, Istanbul 2005, pp. 210-225. Another factor hampering the Istanbul version of *flâneurisme* could be strongly politicized town space, cf. E. Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern. State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2006, pp. 93-124. An interpretation of *Istanbul* as an analogue of Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* was attempted by D. Kozicka, cf. *Stambulskie pasaże*, "Przegląd polityczny" no. 89, 2008, pp. 55-57.
- ²¹ *Takke* – a small and usually woolen cap used in Turkey by conservative Moslem men, a male counterpart of the shawl worn by women wishing to demonstrate their identification with Islam.
- ²² Stephan Lanz described those poor and usually conservative arrivals from the provinces as *anti-urbanites* – the opposite of the "genuine" residents of Istanbul, who in time occupied the majority of urban space and became culturally alien *vis a vis* the town elites, cf. S. Lanz, *If you can make it in Istanbul you can make it anywhere*, in: *Self-Service City: Istanbul*, ed. O. Esen, S. Lanz, b-books, Berlin 2007, fragment available on: <http://www.metrozones.info/istanbul/index.html> (access 15 January 2009).
- ²³ By way of example, the Asian coast, where 35% of the town's population now lives (about 4,5 million people), is mentioned in the book only twice or thrice as a place where Pamuk's friends raced the Mercedes cars borrowed from their fathers (Bagdad Street) and as one of the favourite localisations of engravings by Melling (historical Üsküdar).

Genex

6 November 2010. Entering Belgrade from the west along a highway linking the capital of Serbia with the airport, Budapest, and the whole of Europe, we come across the so-called West Gate or, more precisely, two huge concrete towers topped with a revolving connector. This is Genex – the highest pinnacle of the Banat Plain. I, however, entered Belgrade in another way: by leaving the highway I took a bus crawling and weaving its way amidst the rural houses of the suburbs, which unnoticeably – and in a totally natural manner – blended with the housing estates of New Belgrade. Between the houses and the blocks flickered the gloomy towers – terrifying and fascinating at the same time. This is Genex, I thought. I already knew that I would do anything to get inside, climb to the top, reach the abandoned, closed café on the 31st storey of the rotating roof... *

This could be a fragment from a blog or a book by a globetrotter searching for extreme impressions, traversing former communist countries while seeking unusual adventures, the sort that come from contact with architecture – the often breath-taking ruins of truly futuristic and, literally, unique buildings from the 1960s-1980s, to be encountered from Vladivostok to Trieste. Brutalist constructions made a strong imprint upon the surrounding, and today their former purpose has become unclear. Often uncompleted due to a lack of funds, unfavourable political decisions or, finally, the fall of the Eastern bloc, in the last two decades they turned into ruins and, at times, succumbed to total degradation.

Why am I writing about this? The reason lies in the growing although still niche interest in the topic and in the emergence of a new, specific form of travelling, whose target is “collecting” images of strange architecture, just as landscapes were collected in the past. Actually, the heart of the matter involves experiencing architecture as a form of repression and the uncanny (*Unheimlichkeit*). This situation is sufficiently interesting to draw the attention of an anthropologist. Naturally, specific “love for ruins” is not new; it is rather a successive embodiment of a phenomenon known at least from the French Revolution, when abandoned architecture became an allegory of the irreversible processes of History and in time a symbolic reverse of progress and modernity. This time, however, the accents have been arranged differently. Another interesting phenomenon is the permeation of the theme into the world of contemporary art. Although recently published albums: by the Slovenian photographer Roman Bezjak: *Socialist Modernism – Archeology of an Era* and the photographer Frederick Charbin: *Cosmic Communist Constructions Photographed* (the latter presents almost a hundred curious ultra-modernist although actually totally postmodernist buildings in the former USSR), causing the reader to smile and even

TOMASZ SZERSZEŃ

Phantom Houses and Voyages to Nowhere

more often to experience goose bumps of horror, can be considered more as treats for lovers of architecture it is difficult to ignore the fact that the topic in question was considered by Cyprien Gaillard, winner of last year's prestigious Marcel Duchamp Prize. In his neo-Romantic videos and photograph series strange communist-era buildings appear rather as allegories of the decline of the very idea of modernism, images of living ruins, and, finally, a perverse praise of vandalism, treated like archaeological remnants of some sort of ancient civilisation.

In the Polish context, this theme – perhaps not brutalism as such but socialist modernist architecture in general as well as its fall – has been broached by the photographer Nicolas Groszpiere and in a slightly different manner by the reporter Filip Springer. There exists a whole tangle of issues on which light should be cast in order to explain the reasons for this interest. Put aside curiosity about the widely comprehended heritage of Le Corbusier, the architectural legacy of the communist era and the failure of the modernisation project. Relegate to the margin the otherwise important connections between architecture and utopia. Instead, concentrate on a concrete example: it is time to take a look at Genex.

*

The skyscraper, built in 1977-1980 by the architect Mihajlo Mitrović next to a highway leading towards an airport and the border with Hungary, is located in a district known as Novi Beograd (New Belgrade), i.e. a sprawling housing estate for 250 000 residents on former farmland surrounding the city on the opposite bank of the Sava. It is worth mentioning that New Belgrade is closely connected with Josip Broz Tito: construction work began in 1947 (i.e. immediately after the marshal seized power) and was envisaged as a symbol of new socialist architecture and an equally new and better socialist future. Today, it is an unusual site and, at the same time, typical for the peripheries of cities across Eastern Europe and the Balkans



Fragment video by Cyprian Gaillard *Desnianski Raion* (2007). In the frame Genex.

– modern and often interesting architecture borders with uncontrolled refuse dumps and temporary buildings. It is also worth recalling that the skyscraper was completed in 1980 – the year of Tito's death. Its erection for the Genex export consortium was, therefore, a symbolic caesura, a symptom of all the fundamental contradictions – political, ethnic, and economic – that comprised the specificity of Yugoslavia.

The skyscraper was built in the style of brutalist architecture out of raw concrete, i.e. material identified strongly with trauma and symbolic violence but also with commemoration and memory (during the twentieth century concrete was used for monuments, including those of the Holocaust¹). The architecture of Genex consists of two tall concrete towers – one residential and the other used for offices, combined at the very top with a revolving restaurant, which was never actually opened. The office tower has been closed and totally empty for a long time, while the second tower was used only partly (which makes a specially chilling impression, since abandoned flats adjoin inhabited ones). Recently, the authorities of Belgrade made initial decisions about pulling the building down, and it is probably only a question of time when it will vanish. This phantom-like trait is paradoxical considering that the building in question is simultaneously associ-

ated with a number of more or less realistic visions of its revitalisation and transformation (e.g. of creating at its top the most exclusive nightclub in Belgrade or redesigning the whole edifice for an international conference centre).

From the very onset Genex stirred extreme emotions: some perceived it as a symbol of modernity while others condemned it as brutal intervention into the landscape and urban tissue. It also produced horror due to its claustrophobic concrete interior: narrow stairways and tiny apartments. Up to this day Genex divides the opinions not only of the Serbs but also tourists and experts on architecture from all over the world. This approach is illustrated well by several opinions expressed on discussion fora about architecture: *One of the most terrifying buildings in the world; ideal for committing suicide; unique and exotic; the ugliest building in the world; a monolithic architectural masterpiece; the most disgusting skyscraper in the world; just looking at it hurts; this building is a joke; undoubtedly the most interesting communist building in the world; the ugliest thing in the Balkans; ugly but fascinating; so hopeless that it is fun; this building is genuine and uniquely Serbian...*

A characteristic feature of opinions about Genex is their extraordinary polarisation and mixture of images. Together, they are part of the domain of the meanings

of the symbol, known from phenomenological studies on religion and creating tension between horror and fascination, *tremendum et fascinans*. At the same time, we can consider the inimical and alien architecture of the partly empty building in, e.g. the context of the celebrated book by Anthony Vidler: *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*,² dealing with haunted, uninhabitable houses, or within a psychoanalytical context where oppressive architecture of the interior imposes the Freudian experience of the *Unheimlichkeit*. It can bring to mind in an unclear and disturbing manner that, which is familiar and, at the same time, totally repressed, and which contrary to our wishes returns in the manner of a phantom in another context: the World War II experience, so strong in this part of Europe, or the after images of the ethnic massacres of the 1990s. The horror of the latter consisted of the fact, as Ivan olović stressed,³ that the killings were committed by neighbours often living next to each other in claustrophobically small ethnic ghettos... Another interpretation, this time political, could be based on the observation that the spectacular and brutal skyscraper, combining the traumatic with the utopian - a vision of a wonderful new world with an image of a concentration camp - in a certain sense personified the complicated attitude of the inhabitants of this part of Europe towards the communist era.

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Genex comes alive in yet another, totally different context: contemporary art. It appears in a panoramic take opening the "video-opera" *Diesnansky Raion* (2007) by the above-mentioned French artist Cyprien Gaillard.⁴ Intuition led Gaillard to consider modern architecture, in particular the one originating from the "periphery of modernism", i.e. countries of the former Soviet bloc, the Middle East, South America or the degraded suburbs of large West European metropolises, within the context of the inevitable disintegration inscribed into its nature. This process is the reason why they become ruins at the moment of completion. Genex is a model-like example: the building started to age and succumb to degradation only several years after it was finished, and the revolving, modern cafe at the top of the skyscraper never actually operated. Its function, similarly to that of the abandoned ("inhospitable") flats, was gradually obliterated and forgotten. This phenomenon could be described by using a term created at the turn of the 1960s by the American artist Robert Smithson, namely, "de-architecturisation", i.e. the loss of the building's originally assumed functions.⁵ No longer used, it becomes in a certain sense excluded from the present and is perceived as a relic of the past or, on the contrary, turns into a materialisation of a vision of the future. This paradox absorbs Gaillard's attention: a building losing its function and

becoming "its own ghost" can be discussed outside the context of architecture, for example, as a remnant of some no longer existing civilisation or a futuristic object, a natural elevation of space or a land-art sculpture, finally, as a ready natural art installation. In this context it is possible to comprehend why one of the strategies applied by contemporary artists is extreme tourism as a form of art. An interpretation of a building subjected to disintegration remains in the hands of the artist, but also in those of the recipients - it is the latter who imagine its function. Without becoming aware of this semantic shift it is difficult to understand the series of actions proposed by curator Joanna Warsza in the abandoned 10th-Anniversary Stadium, soon to be torn down.⁶

Cyprien Gaillard added something more to this intriguing artistic diagnosis: a paradoxical linking of the entopic with the spectacular. One of his works shows the remarkable end of a housing block in the peripheries of a Scottish town: the very moment when it is being demolished. A miserable block, a typical machine for living, terminates its life with a striking firework - is this not a paradox? The moment when it had already ceased to exist and its particles became scattered all over the vicinity gains for the artist the dimension of an allegory: it is a posthumous monument, or rather,



Genex. Photo: Tomasz Szerszeń

evoking a neologism created by yet another American artist, Gordon Matta-Clark, a "non-ument" of the building, existing only in a work of art as a spectacle of disintegration.

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Time to return to Genex. Is this skyscraper-phantom a "non-ument"? Or perhaps it is rather a monument that does not commemorate anything apart from the process of its disintegration?

It is thanks to art that such sites as Genex begin to exist anew even if this is a highly paradoxical existence. Apparently, on this case artists are interested much more in the aspect of non-existence: the negative factor inscribed into the essence of these places, their phantom quality. This process was noticed by the anthropologist Roch Sulima, who analysing the demise of the 10th-Anniversary Stadium /Marketplace Europa, drew attention: *Artistic undertakings rendering aesthetic the space and time of the agony of the Stadium-bazaar define something that I shall describe as "in-between" aesthetics. They build meanings out of absence and non-continuum (the aesthetics of the void). Just as absent is Warsaw, a city of rubble, the finish lines of the Peace Race bicycle race, communist regime harvest festivities together with the pathos of their collectivism and apotheosis of social engineering. The vivid outlines of the site of meetings with the Pope during his second pilgrimage are becoming hazy, the spatial structure and emotional contents of Marketplace Europa are turning into a part of nonentity. These multiplied absences and emptiness mutually define and reinforce each other and add significance to meanings.*⁷

Can it be said that the concepts of emptiness, absence, and phantom qualities, in this part of the world closely connected with a comprehension of architecture and space, in some astonishing way bring these reflections close to the historiosophic diagnoses proposed by Jan Sowa in his recently published book: *Fantomowe ciało króla: peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*⁸ (in this context the subtitle: "peripheral strife with modern form" is particularly significant)? This is a question for further reflection.

II. Hotel Palenque

Thinking about Genex, the socialist modernist heritage and, more extensively, architecture in our part of Europe, including the already non-existent 10th Anniversary Stadium, in Warsaw, I cannot resist a certain especially evocative phantom. I have in mind a vision of Hotel Palenque in the Yucatan, a place that became famous (only virtually: has anyone ever actually seen Hotel Palenque?) thanks to Robert Smithson.

This American artist, the creator of *land-art* – whose premature tragic death in 1973 rendered him truly immortal – studied connections between archi-

itecture and entropy. The topic appeared in his work for the first time several years before his death, in a photo-essay: *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic*,⁹ a pseudo-tourist guide to his hometown, i.e. crumbling industrial Passaic, full of collapsing, once very modern industrial buildings (a landscape much too familiar in our part of the world...). Smithson assumed the pose of a tourist seeing the ruins of Rome and interpreting decrepit industrial buildings as aesthetic objects as well as, and this is particularly interesting, the remnants of some old, long gone culture. *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* contains an outline of an approach typical for Smithson: the examination of architecture in the perspective of time as a relic of the past or a materialised vision of the future, and not from the viewpoint of the present.

The same motifs were developed two years later in *Hotel Palenque*. Smithson came to Palenque in the Yucatan, a locality up to then celebrated for its famous Maya temple, and ... he discovered Hotel Palenque: a curious uncompleted building/non-building, a ruin that, however, still functioned as a hotel. In this manner, the expedition to Yucatan appears to have been a late modernistic caricature of an exotic voyage, which, as Witkacy and Michel Leiris demonstrated so vividly, always ends in disappointment and emptiness. Another aspect of this caricature is an ironic probable reference to Georges Bataille's *Extinct America* (1928), depicting the world of the Mayas and the Aztecs, non-existent for centuries, as an incessant bloody festival. Here, instead of such a festivity we are dealing with entropic reality on the peripheries of an increasingly global world. Smithson also stressed the motif of a linguistic misunderstanding: when in 1517 the Spanish conquistadores landed in Yucatan they misheard the words: *mac'ubah than* ("we do not understand") spoken by the encountered Mayas and took it for the name of the peninsula. In the eyes of the artist, Yucatan built on a misunderstanding is, due to a basic premise, a non-place.

Smithson considered Hotel Palenque from the viewpoint of inevitable entropy: an unstoppable process of deformation that is the reason why thinking about construction as something durable that which will last for ages becomes archaic. For Smithson the only constant is decline. The context of decomposition and disintegration produces a vision of architecture that can be comprehended only as the absence of any sort of human order.¹⁰ Interestingly, in this context he referred to a certain pessimistic motif delineated by Claude Lévi-Strauss on the margin of *Tristes Tropiques*: a vision of the anthropologist as an entropologist, i.e. a researcher dealing with disintegration and cultural corrosion. In one of his interviews Smithson drew attention to its affiliation to his conceits of "entropy" and "de-architecture": *Lévi-Strauss had a*

good insight, he suggested we change the study of anthropology into "entropology". It would be a study that devotes itself to the process of disintegration in highly developed structures. After all, wreckage is often more interesting than structure.¹¹

Hotel Palenque is actually the opposite of a Romantic ruin – the building is not collapsing into a ruin but "grows to become a ruin" and was a ruin before it was even raised. As in dialectic visions by Walter Benjamin, the processes of construction and disintegration mutually permeate each other, creating a state of an endless exchange between the new and the old, construction and ruin, the past and the future. In an auto-commentary (which assumed the form of an ironic, para-scientific lecture given to a full lecture hall at the University of Utah) Smithson drew attention that the hotel was built in the same spirit in which the Mayas erected their temples. Many constantly changed the facades, with successive facades added on top of each other and overlapping. *The structure has all the convolution and terror, in a sense that you would find in a typical Mayan temple...*¹² This witty observation can be, however, interpreted quite seriously: in that case, the structure of Hotel Palenque would be a relic of earlier forms, their "life after life".¹³ Smithson discussed in detail the successive elements of this extremely strange hybrid, such as uncompleted stairs leading to nowhere: a motif as if straight out of Piranesi's *Le Carceri d'Invenzione* series. He also accentuated the fact that the building is losing its purpose – since the function becomes blurred Smithson invented it: we are dealing with an example of late Mayan architecture, an actuation of Piranesi's vision in the Mexican jungle, or else with "absolute functionalistic" architecture... The American artist found particularly tempting the possibility of considering the Hotel in an anti-anthropocentric perspective, i.e. as a special sort of escalation – natural sculpture – caused by the impact of the forces of Nature. This moment in reflections about architecture led him subsequently to such realisations as *Spiral Jetty* (1970).

In reference to a photograph showing the Hotel door Smithson ended his commentary as follows: *There's not really much you can say about it, I mean it's just a green door. We've all seen green doors at one time in our lives. It gives out a sense of universality that way, a sense of kind of global cohesion. The door probably opens up to nowhere and closes on nowhere so that we leave the Hotel Palenque with this closed door and return to the University of Utah.*¹⁴ Could it be that Hotel Palenque – this genuine model-like Non-site – was a passageway of sorts leading from nowhere to nowhere, a global mirror in which it is possible to see everything with the exception of the longed for "monument"? This means that Yucatan, that

outcome of a linguistic misunderstanding, lies elsewhere!

III. Hotel Playte

12 September 2009. Crete. A road leading from the mountains to the sea: from the ancient ruins of Polyrihia to the resort of Castello. On the side, concealed by trees, olive groves, and Mediterranean shrubs, stands Hotel Playif (the absence of one of the letters of the neon, long out of order, creates an opportunity for speculation: perhaps the name was Playie or Playte...?). Merged with the landscape, partly overgrown by wild plants, and with cracked windowpanes, it resembles more a relic of some long lost civilisation than a site until recently inhabited by crowds of tourists. Actually, the latter is uncertain – I do not know whether the hotel went bankrupt or was never completed. That is irrelevant. At any rate, I cannot cease thinking about it as a sui generis land-art sculpture, sprouting out of the mountain slope in the manner of a strangely shaped rock ...

Endnotes

- ¹ Cf. e.g. Adrien Forty, *Beton i pamięć*, transl. Katarzyna Bojarska, "Konteksty" 2009, no.1-2.
- ² Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge, Mass. 1992.
- ³ Cf. Ivan Čolović, *Balkany – terror kultury*, transl. Magdalena Petryńska, Wołowiec 2007.
- ⁴ I wrote more extensively about Gaillard in: *Gaillard: romantyczny wandal*, "dwutygodnik.com" 2011, no. 67. I also wrote twice on connections between architecture and entropy: *Cóż nam po ruinach modernizmu? Z Woli do Hotelu Palenque – i z powrotem*, "Konteksty" 2011, no. 2-3, and: *Miejsca, których nie było*, "Kultura miasta" 2011, no. 2.
- ⁵ Kai Vöckler, *The Disappearance of Architecture as an Artistic Theme*, exhibition catalogue: *Die Moderne als Ruine. Eine Archäologie der Gegenwart*, Vienna 2009, pp. 151-152.
- ⁶ Cf. Joanna Warsza, *Stadion X. Miejsce, którego nie było. O projektach performatywnych w przestrzeni Stadionu Dziesięciolecia*, "Konteksty" 2009, no. 1-2.
- ⁷ Roch Sulima, *Stadion-bazar*, "Konteksty" 2009, no. 1-2, p. 145.
- ⁸ Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla: peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków 2012.
- ⁹ Robert Smithson, *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey*, "Artforum", no. 4/1967, pp. 48-51.
- ¹⁰ Kai Vöckler, *The Disappearance of Architecture as an Artistic Theme*, exhibition catalogue: *Die Moderne als Ruine. Eine Archäologie der Gegenwart*, Vienna 2009, pp. 151-152.
- ¹¹ Robert Smithson, ...*The Earth, subject to cataclysms, is a cruel master. Interview with Gregoire Müller*, in: *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, University of California Press, pp. 256-257.
- ¹² Robert Smithson, *Hotel Palenque*, exhibition catalogue: *Die Moderne als Ruine. Eine Archäologie der Gegenwart*, Vienna 2009, p. 165.
- ¹³ In the meaning ascribed to this concept [*Nachleben*] by the German historian of art Aby Warburg.
- ¹⁴ Smithson, *Hotel Palenque...*, p. 165.

Poor Ethnography

In 1981 "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" published answers to a questionnaire posing the following question: "Ethnography – Ethnology – Anthropology of Culture – Folk Studies. What are they? What is their aim?"¹ Apparently, the question concerning ethnography divided the respondents the least. Despite great differences in perceiving the pursued discipline almost all agreed with the image of ethnography presented by L. Stomma. An auxiliary science – ethnography – whose range corresponds to the first phases on research: observation and description, fieldwork. The characteristic type of ethnological research is a monograph pertaining to a sufficiently limited group so that the author is capable of amassing the majority of his information thanks to personal experience. Ethnography also encompasses methods and techniques referring to work on the spot, the classification (...) and description of particular cultural phenomena regardless whether the heart of the matter concerns arms, tools, beliefs or institutions (Claude Lévi-Strauss). Ethnography thus encompasses works that are often the easy victim of derision – studies that propose catalogues of farm tools, rural wells, beliefs about plants, etc. and the range of their occurrence, monographs dealing with particular villages, etc. Naturally, they would be deprived of all meaning if they were to constitute an aim in itself (unfortunately, this does take place). After all, their role entails collecting sources and the introduction of order within the latter for the sake of ethnology. In this sense they can be useful and valuable. As can be seen, the differentiation of ethnology and ethnography is not a question of terminological jugglery. Its indispensability is delineated by the regrettably rather unfamiliar motto formulated by Jean-Thierry Maertens: Each ethnologist must be also, at least partly, an ethnographer. After all, the path from ethnography to ethnology remains long.² A quarter of a century ago ethnography did not pose a challenge for the authors of New Polish Ethnology and the respected representatives of its classical form. It remained merely a first step, necessary but still ra-

ther simple and calling more for organisational than intellectual effort. Questions, problems, and cognitive difficulties were to come to the fore after this stage, naturally for those capable of following the long path towards ethnology. Reflection, interpretation, and science worthy of a university level – all pertained not so much to practicing ethnography, which took place "somewhere", as to the creation of ethnology and anthropology taking place "here", in the very centre. Exercises and professions, the path and the target – this was the order of the relation. It would be difficult, therefore, to become surprised that ethnography vanished from the names of scientific institutions. Anthropology and ethnology sounded more serious and more respectable and, predominantly, they better revealed the meaning of the network – the discovery of the "truth" of culture and man. As is usually the case, conciliation above all decisions – and the question of ethnography became its unexpected and unconscious cause – is more the effect of ignorance, lack of concentration, and absence of deeper reflection than an obvious and well-devised assessment. When practicing ethnography was regarded as an object of studies, *being there* – as the phenomenon in question was interpreted by Clifford Geertz, one of the most brilliant commentators – revealed its entire complicated nature. Suddenly, everything started to become distorted. What is that mythical "terrain" in which research is to be conducted? Why is it to be precisely that and not the other, what are the criteria of selection, and what should be the decisive premise? What about research itself, the great task of collecting sources and putting them into order? What methods of obtaining information are most adequate, and when can we accept that sources are so complete that we can start transforming them? What sort of methods should be applied and what sort of carriers can be used in view of the fact that they all somehow deform reality? These are only some of the more obvious questions. The heart of the matter does not lie in the fact that there are no answers. They do exist, but when everything has to be justified then ethnography, an ancillary science and the first step towards ethnology, begins to expand and grows complicated. It becomes involved in interpretations and presents ambiguous material for further analysis, endowed with a great number of question marks. Nonetheless, thanks to studies by C. Geertz we can indicate several properties of ethnographic knowledge, i.e. those that define it the strongest.³ Probably the most obvious is its local nature, the outcome of a close connection of the presented image and fieldwork. Naturally, one cannot be everywhere and see everything. The solution to this obvious observation was to assume the form of a monograph: a single place, a single institution or belief, nothing more and yet so much, intensely and personally observed and experienced.

We attach importance to the idea of a monograph not because this is the form in which real ethnography was to realise itself. Belief in the existence of small, isolated cultures that can be totally grasped has lain in ruin for long. The fact that decryption calls for distinction and is always made by someone continues to exist and possesses obvious significance. Today, a monograph is not a holistic description of something, but a detailed depiction of someone. Geertz coined the term “thick description”: Ethnography comes down to thick description. *What the ethnographer is in fact faced with—except when (as, of course, he must do) - he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection - is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render. And this is true at the most down-to-earth, jungle field work levels of his activity; interviewing informants, observing rituals, eliciting kin terms, tracing property lines, censuring households ... writing his journal. Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of “construct a reading of”) a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour.*⁴ To present “something” in an ethnographic manner designates not only providing diverse images, as colourful and intense as possible, but also presenting it in such a way so that it would disclose meanings. This is the obverse and the reverse of identity, its two indispensable sides. To see and seek meaning is the point of departure for practice, which ends with a record of sensible perception. In order to provide such testimony, to obtain local knowledge, the ethnographer sets off, and, just as Jerzy S. Wasilewski, he “travels” or like Andrzej Stasiuk, he “goes to Babadag”. He comes across space, physically experiencing its concrete nature. This fact restricts and closes, moderates the cognitive impetus, but at the same time forces to become cautious, brings forth the importance of the detail, and hones the senses that touch reality. On-the-spot practice offering dense description – such is the path that we follow.

We do not describe the entire World, but only the selected particular world experienced by us. Our activity is limited by space, on the one hand, and by invisible and omnipresent time, on the other hand. The fact that our discipline has been always facing the temporal problem is testified by its important categories - cold, archaic culture of the folk type. Within the spaces of those cultures – natural for ethnographic activity – time was to signify so little that its impact could be outright ignored. Images – the effects of lengthy observation (months rather than years) - could be regarded not as historical evidence but as a

description of the nature of those worlds. Today, such a premise cannot be maintained. The contemporary shape of the life of the protagonists of ethnographic grand narratives from the first half of the twentieth century has changed immensely. The Boro tribe, the Nuer people, the Trobriand islanders, the inhabitants of Białka, Jurgów, and Łapszanka, whom we visited at the end of the previous century, all differ. The obvious character of this observation is the reason why it is necessary to accept not only the fact that we were there and wrote here but also that we were there and then and are writing now. This act has its consequences. The ethnographic account becomes light because time deprives it of its ultimate and categorical qualities, while at the same time granting it universality. After all, everything turns out to be particular, distinctive, and in this sense exotic, since nothing can resist the voracious passage of time. This outright audible murmur of time renders ethnographic activity feverish, immensely expands its domain, and prolongs its duration infinitely. If the world has actually diminished and time has accelerated then we are facing a magnificent challenge. In his essay: *A la Recherche du Présent Perdu* M. Kundera wrote: *When we study, discuss, analyse a reality, we analyse it as it appears in our mind, in our memory. We know reality only in the past tense. We do not know it as it is in the present, in the moment when it's happening, when it is. The present moment is unlike the memory of it. Remembering is not the negative of forgetting. Remembering is a form of forgetting. We can assiduously keep a diary and note every event. Rereading the entries one day, we will see that they cannot evoke a single concrete image. And still worse: that the imagination is unable to help our memory along and reconstruct what has been forgotten.*

*The present - the concreteness of the present - as a phenomenon to consider, as a structure, is for us an unknown planet; so we can neither hold on to it in our memory nor reconstruct it through imagination. We die without knowing what we have lived.*⁵ In the sketch: *In Search of Present Time* he added:

By definition, what a narrator recounts is a thing that has happened. But each little event, as it becomes the past, loses its concrete nature and turns into an outline. Narration is recollection, therefore a summary, a simplification, an abstraction. (...)

The nineteenth century began amid decades of explosive events that, time and again and from top to bottom, transfigured the whole of Europe. Something essential in man's existence changed then and forever: History became everyone's experience; man began to understand that he was not going to die in the same world he had been born into (...) *The shape of every little object – every chair, every skirt – was stamped with its imminent disappearance (transformation). The age of descriptions began (Description: compassion for the ephemeral; salvaging the perishable).*⁶

The author of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* deals with the problem of the present upon the occasion of his journey across the history of the novel. It is not written by an ethnographer, albeit literary problems affect him too. Just like the novelist he is compelled, willing or not, to resolve the question of presentation. Ethnographic knowledge is historical since it is by way of necessity the outcome of recollection, evocation, the enlivening of memory; it is testimony and a view from afar. Such distance in time and space is not so much complicated as unavoidable. This is the way things were there - says the ethnographer, coming to terms with the historical and local nature of his knowledge stemming from personal experience and producing his own testimony.

By the very nature of things, ethnographic knowledge is thus limited and fragmentary. Its features are enhanced by the fact that it is the outcome of someone's cultivation, and that a concrete someone had derived it from a certain place and time. The ethnographer is distinctive not because he wishes to be original but because he is a person, a unique *summa* of places, time, language, tradition, family, and a multitude of other factors that distinguish him. Ethnography should be thus treated as the outcome of a meeting of individualised qualities and life. The auteur character of this knowledge, the fact that it always possesses its characteristic style, confirms its incompleteness and non-systematic qualities. The title of a book by Dariusz Czaja: *Sygnatura i fragment. Narracje antropologiczne* brilliantly captures this quality and at the same time refers to yet another publication: *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* by Clifford Geertz, demonstrating the significance of the literary aspect of this activity. Writing, the process of tackling words, style, and convention, is not merely an enhancing supplement but an important structural element of ethnographic praxis. The force of ethnographic knowledge depends on the quality of its transmission, on the class of the author as a man of letters. After Geertz it is no longer possible to treat the literary quality as a charge levelled against ethnography. It cannot be non-literary, but remains written well or not, a feature that cannot be evaded.

Local and historical qualities, fragmentariness and literariness - each of those traits is connected with a choice. If the latter is to be conscious (which is not necessary, but certainly remains desirable) then it calls for justification. Why the opera and not a highlander's costume, whence mass culture and not that of the Eskimo? A totally fundamental explanation is ontological. We deal with something due to its ontological nature. This necessary condition is probably insufficient. Certain order can be discovered in extremely non-homogeneous collections, i.e. ethnography. The most frequently described spaces were worlds that today are weak, vanishing, marginal, and insufficiently

appreciated. True, they could possess numerous representations, such as the peasant or nineteenth-century tribal cultures, but the centre that at the time generated the civilizational model perceived them as low, archaic, and without a future. Interest in that, which was weak and declining possessed different ideological justifications, but this was a durable tendency: from the strong to the weak, from the certain to that, which calls for justification. To put it differently: the ethnographer seeks poverty and grows close to it. What is the source of this curious predilection, this strange fascination? Evolutionists mentioned the beginnings of cultures, the first stages. This is where they wished to perceive them. For the functional school, the structuralists and the semioticians, these were *sui generis* samples offering a better and easier view of mechanisms ruling culture as a whole. Marginal qualities could be also important for delineating a fuller image of man, for extracting that, which dominates and in reality is concealed and not at all obvious. These justifications, to a considerable extent possessing solely historical value (which is not to say that they were devoid of value), are certainly insufficient to explain the force of the attraction of poor reality. It is by no means permanently ascribed to a certain place, time, or concrete social or ethnic group. It becomes extracted only by comparison and reference, and appears in a relation. Strong and diverse existence refers to weak existence, the certainty of memory - to shameful oblivion, while obvious value - to doubtful quality, the group - to the individual, and culture - to life.

The ethnographer seeking poverty sets off for the Amazon or the cinema in his university town or other peripheries of his world. He assumes according to the wisdom of his discipline - and it is less important for his work whether he does so consciously - that, which Tadeusz Kantor, the great expert on poverty, once said:

*The peripheries do not denote decline and submission. In my private dictionary there exists the term: REALITY OF THE LOWEST RANK. A terrain reserved (illegally) for Art. And thus for all supreme human values. Here, the peripheries possess their high rank. Explosions of this myth, manifested in the most unexpected places, do not act, for all practical purposes, anywhere but in those peripheries. To put it in the language of art and poetry - in the poor courtyard, the pitiful corner, where we conceal our most secret hopes, our imagination, our threatened humanity, our personality. And probably only there we might become redeemed.*⁷

Yet another depiction of the ethnographic promised land comes from the essay: *The Assistants* by Giorgio Agamben. The assistant of this Italian philosopher, living a "damaged life" personifies that what is doomed or, more exactly: *It concerns the unending mass of what becomes irrevocably lost* [in the history of society and in

the history of individuals, far greater than that what can be stored in the archives of memory]. *Throughout our lives, the measure of oblivion and ruin, the ontological waste that we carry in ourselves far exceeds the small mercy of our memories and our consciousness. But this formless chaos of the forgotten that accompanies us like a silent golem is neither inert nor inefficacious. On the contrary, it influences us just as much as our conscious memories, although in a different way. Forgetting has a force and a way of operating that cannot be measured in the same terms as that of conscious memory, nor can it be accumulated like knowledge. Its persistence determines the status of all knowledge and understanding. The exigency of the lost does not entail being remembered and commemorated; rather it entails remaining in us and with us is forgotten, and in this way and only in this way, remaining unforgettable.*⁸

In this approach towards a comprehension of the force of the attraction of poor reality to which, as we can see, not merely ethnographers succumbed, listen to the great Marina Tsvetaeva describing the “belongings of the poor”.⁹

Paupers’ things. A bast mat? That’s a phony
Thing. Like a plain plank of wood.

Paupers’ things – they’re all skin-and-bony,
Wholly – meatless, solely soul-food.

Where’d they come from? Seems – from a distance,

From long ago. Don’t strain your eyes!

Paupers’ things – have no pre-existence:

They are cut from people’s insides!

A shelf? Haphazard. A coat-hanger? Ditto.

Accidental too that ghost of a

Chair. Possessions? Dry twigs and hisses, –

All the woods on an October day!

Poverty’s fractioned furnishings!

All are – what? – a quarter, a third.

Clearly they long since interred these things.

Just to look at you makes me hurt!

It’s hard to take one’s sinful eyes off

You, as off ulcerous sores.

Viennese chair – where’s the Vienna –

Whose? When? It’s a thing to deplore!

The best things – here – would have slighted

Your house, right? Sorry! – your store-

Room. Here alone are such blighted

Things – things. Your brow arches over

thus: ? – How else when seeing dull, widow’s

Rags? – Raise a brow! (In lieu of lorgnette –

A brow!) The eye’s no mean asker with those

Brows. At times an eye’s an o-ject.

So dry at times is it and vacant –

An immense, gorgeous woman’s eye,

That – compare them – it seems a basin’s

Spirit, the soul – a tub of lye.

Same as with tub and sieve I’d own it

– To the tsar! on Judgment Day! –
Each one called here as a poet
On himself has known that gaze!
Poverty’s modest utensils!
Each knife is personally known.
Like a creature, day commencing,
Partly here, wholly – you roam –
Out the windows, bare or facing
Suburbs – you’ve read the crime news?
How to gauge chasteness, grace in
A thing: as baggage it’s refused.
Since it’s wobbly and could pulverize
Right before one’s very eyes,
Since almost nothing that frail survives
Constant shifts...

She cries –

Since it’s not: a desk, but a spouse,

Or son. Not a, but our

Chest.

Since nobody for hearts and souls

Gives out baggage checks.

Paupers’ things are drier and thinner:

Drier than snags, thinner than bast.

Paupers’ things are – put simply – spirits,

That is why they burn up so fast.

These texts, written in such different forms by authors whose points of departure were dissimilar traditions and spiritual experiences, demonstrate the beauty and goodness of premises for wandering across the provinces of poverty. Firm ethnographic presence is not based, therefore, on a convenient repetition of a once made choice. Its spiritual sources and the question whether they had been made consciously are already the themes of separate reflections. Even today, when one follows a designated direction, they reveal well-known drudgery. The described world disappears and there is nothing that one may match with the image in order to test its adequacy. Informers vanish somewhere in non-being or, worse, change their convictions, views, and stories. That what has been seen, heard, felt, touched, and experienced in other ways has to be contained within a single whole. In the wake of Malinowski’s *Dziennik* it is not, however, possible to pretend that we simply had not been there. In other words, we too should find ourselves within the presentation. This forces us towards literature and renders our scientific endeavours, already previously rather poor, even more meagre.

At the same time, this is by no means an individual ailment, but the feature of an entire discipline. Ethnography is quite correctly situated along the margin of the social sciences. He who deals with poverty fares poorly. The ethnographic tent, compared with the solid edifices of other sciences pertaining to the main

current of reality and based on the experiment and quantitative methods, does not have an imposing appearance. On the other hand, it features astounding adequacy both in relation to the constantly nomadic character of ethnography – a science of the path and on the move – and to the traits of the world examined by it. There where the dominating features are disappearance, change, fleeting memory, the bustle of daily life, the detail and minutiae, poor endowment appears to be the most suitable. Anthropological narration, its basic instrument of work based on a catalogue of concepts and categories devised in the course of its history and applying comparison as the fundamental manner of extracting meaning, will never possess such force and expression as the one characteristic for the grand texts of the interpreters of the poor world. The ethnographer will not create *Stalker* or *The Kolyma Tales*, *Wielopole* or *Fado*. His art, just like his science, is distant from the centre and in this sense remains marginal. Powerlessness, lack of lucidity, the absence of contemporaneity, in a word: provincialism, come to the fore also in this particular encounter. This would appear to be a weakness if it were not for the qualities closely connected with it. Such openness, blurred form, and borderline qualities open up towards otherness and render its presence obvious and constant. The tendency towards making use of the experiences of other sciences, permanent in ethnography, and inspirations borrowed from the world of art - all are sustained by its provincialism.

Encircling ethnography, we continue coming across specific poverty, paradoxically brimming with potential and diverse meanings since *burns so fast*. The ethnographer wishes to trust that *the whole world hides in every particle* (Bruno Schulz) and as befits a zealous believer he wants to confirm by means of his praxis the revelation bestowed upon him. He thus multiplies images and adds postcards and successive fragments. The storeroom containing these snatches displays considerable confusion: French monarchs and the song *Polesia Czar*, Eskimos and the Maasai, smokers, mountain climbers, those living in the jungle and in the streets of great metropolises, chaotic treasures lacking order. This is a collection of evidence and, at the same time, testimony of heroic memory, ever renewed despite the depressing knowledge that only a few of its products will become animated in some sort of recollection. What is the purpose of these poor riches?

In his lecture: *The Inevitability of the Humanities*¹⁰ the German philosopher Odo Marquard posed the following thesis: *The more modern the modern world becomes, the more inevitable do the humanities become.*¹¹ Justifying this thought, Marquard indicated the erroneousness of the popular conviction: the humanities based on narration are archaic and in the course of a modernization of the world are ousted by modern

natural sciences based on an experiment and by humanities using measurements. A closer look, however, shows quite the opposite. Sciences founded on narration come into being as a response to the successes of experimental sciences and the modernisation changes initiated by them. The emergence of experimental sciences is not the cause of the death but of the birth of the humanities; in other words, the humanities are not the victims of modernisation but its outcome and thus are thoroughly modern.¹² After some time, every sort of progress within the range of the former will enforce a growing need for the latter. The more the world becomes modernized the greater its need for narrative sciences. Recurring opinions about their crisis in modern reality should be treated not so much as a crisis of capacity but as a crisis of surcharge. The humanities are not dying off but - although they are developing - they do not keep up with their modern indispensability.¹³

The necessity for those detailed narrations and the growing need for them come from the fact that modernisation stimulated by the experimental sciences produces losses in the environment while the humanities compensate those losses.¹⁴ Uniformisation, objectivisation, globalization – the effects of modernisation – deprive man of his tradition, history, and specificity. In order to successfully tackle them, to bear the burdens and challenges of modernization, one needs narrative sciences, which at least partly provide a chance for regaining that, which is lost. They spin three types of stories: those that produce sensitivity, preserve, and orientate. First, they restore colour and intensity to reality and level the modernization disenchantment of the world. Second, they translate and justify the collection, reconstruction, and storage of the remnants of the past. No epoch has produced so much destruction as the modern one, and no epoch has preserved as much as the modern one thanks to the development of the ability to take an increasing part of the past into the future.¹⁵ A museum, a Skansen, a concert of old music, a reconstruction of a mystery play – these are the forms of such narration. Finally, they extract from the homogeneous and magma-like presence the components creating it and cast light upon them, thus making it possible to discern their quality, meaning, and wisdom.¹⁶ Such narrations not only make it possible to better understand them and to endow their existence with depth and intensity. Their easily and universally accessible collection shows the ambiguity of reality, the possibility of its various comprehensions and experiencing. It becomes possible to draw forth the premises of diverse choices. On the other hand, it is impossible to justify any sort of categorical and exclusive qualities with the assistance of such a collection. The inevitability of the humanities is also based on the fact that they demonstrate and stress the value

of ambiguity and disclose the misery and poverty of unambiguity and exclusiveness.

The Odo Marquand lecture discusses narrative humanities, whose province is ethnography. The meanings and future of its existence in the light of the reflections pursued by the author of *Apology of the Accidental* appear to be lucid. At the beginning of the twenty first century, in a reality characterised as post-modern, liquid, post-metaphysical, and ontologically weak this discipline appears to be much more contemporary than prior to the breakthrough, which all sorts of “post...” wish to put into thought.

All anthropo-- and ethnological projects intent on extracting models, functions, mechanisms or structures of culture as such were important in conducting a quest, but their ultimate outcome – a cultural common denominator, proved to be always a phenomenon of a concrete culture and not some sort of a general rule. They can, however, continue being fascinating if we see in them principles organising strong anthropological narrations, revealing not the mythical foundation of culture but metaphysical premises making it possible to present it in a given manner. A survey conducted a quarter of century ago offers a good image of various discourses, a debate that, however, does not pertain to the idea of a strong narrative. Only within its space do particular elements assume meaning. Hence the domination of ethnology and the servile nature of ethnography, the significance of ideas and the weakness of reality. If, however, as G. Vattimo wrote in his essay: *Hermeneutics and Anthropology*: We do not wish to continue transforming anthropology into metaphysics – a description of the universal structures of the existence of man, anthropology conceived as a scientific description of the constants of particular cultures - profoundly determined by the metaphysical idea of science and, on a more concrete level, the Occidentalisation of our planet,¹⁷ then the situation changes significantly. The otherness that takes place does not consist of a critical overcoming of the past, its rejection in the name of new premises or methods for the sake of a better process of approaching the truth. It should be connected with an awareness of the contestability and discursiveness of all foundations and, at the same time, with their necessity. In his encounter with the “others”, an event that opens up all sorts of ethnologies, the ethnologist is a person who knows how those phenomena had been created. Such knowledge renders this encounter special and in many instances becomes the basic reason for its existence. It is, therefore, impossible to eliminate or even suspend it. It is, however, feasible to indicate the weakness of the conclusions that deprive them of their categorical and ultimate nature. This weakness is the necessary outcome of the historical quality of each meeting and can be reduced only by metaphysical premises. The

discovery of their presence, restoring the nature of anthropology, does not lessen the importance of its accomplishments but turns them into a problem and calls for reinterpretations. Actually, it enlivens them, makes them contemporary, and revitalises them. The history of the discipline seen from this perspective is not a movement from childhood towards maturity, but an amassment of the historical experiences of a new phenomenon, not always unambiguous and open towards new comprehension. Today, ethnology in the above-presented meaning of the word is frail not only because it embarked upon the effort of an exegesis of its history. Otherness and the space of its references also possess an equally weak character. G. Vattimo: That which we can actually observe is a collection of contemporary “derivatives” of the primitive, hybrid forms, relics contaminated with modernity, *margins of the present which embrace both Third World societies and the ghettos of industrial societies*. (...) We are dealing not so much with a total organisation of the world according to rigid technological schemes as with a “mine” of preserved forms that together with an uneven division of power and natural resources on a global scale becomes the source of increasingly numerous margin situations constituting the truth of primitive culture in our world. (...) Anthropology is not an encounter with radical difference or a scientific “putting into order” of the phenomenon of mankind in the categories of structures. In all likelihood, its form of the dialogue is inclined towards the past and the ancient, but only in such a way in which the arche may appear in an epoch of fulfilled metaphysics: as that, which survived and is marginal and contaminated.¹⁸

If this characteristic of the contemporary existence of the discipline is apt then the process of seeking and disclosing truth in its space runs a course contrary to the one described by L. Stomma in the memorable questionnaire. Becoming acquainted with grand narratives, the ability to apply them, and even their critical analysis, in a word, the process of being an ethnologist is a necessary stage but not an ultimate one. The encounter with the others, with strangers, is impossible in the field of ethnology, which is always some sort of an epistemology, with the ethnologist situated within a point transcendental in relation to this event. In order to experience this fundamental meeting one must possess indispensable personal experience. Practising ethnography, field research is nothing else than a quest for such experience. It also cannot be reduced exclusively to intellectual games, but remains a great physical exhaustion, the spiritual discomfort of a voyeur and an intruder, the feeling of loneliness and unlikeness. This must give rise to aggression and bad emotions. Malinowski’s call: *Exterminate the brutes* is, after all, the archetypical howl. Such experience somehow extracts from previous existence and weakens it by depriving

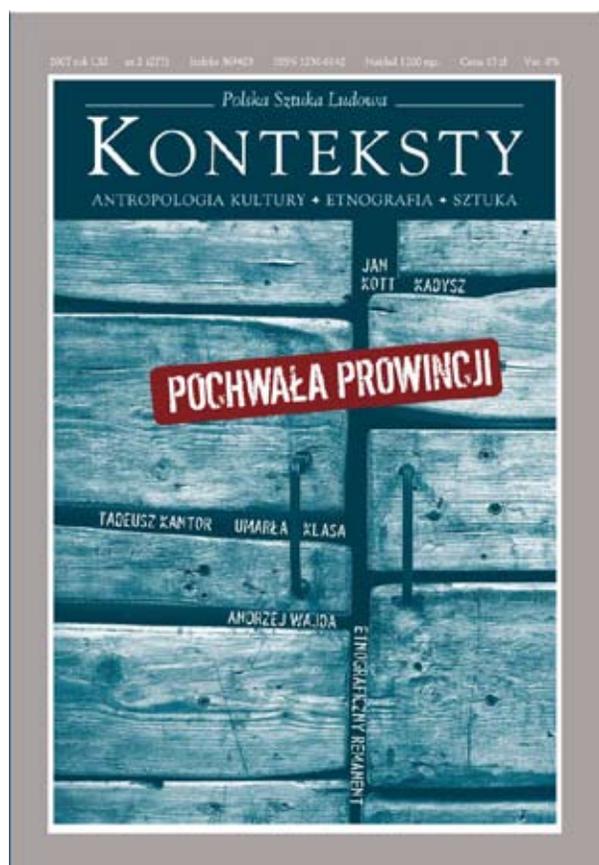
it of natural and obvious qualities. The ethnographic event starts with such a state, but in order for it to actually take place it is necessary to experience the positive nature, the insight, and to capture the principle, which, true, would not make it possible to become domesticated in alienness and in this manner to bear it, but enables its comprehension or at the very least explanation. While describing this event it becomes mandatory to refer to F. Ankersmit and his presentations of the historical experience.¹⁹ F. Ankersmit needed this category in order to demonstrate that it is possible to reach historical reality differently than only *via* the intermediary text. The Dutch researcher emphasised that this event possesses an aesthetic nature and is some sort of an illumination producing obvious knowledge. Similarly, in relation to an artwork it severs the contextual network and from the surface refers directly towards the essence. Within the clearance produced by this rift there emerges an unknown truth of being, not to be derived from historical wandering across contexts. The practice of ethnography has to be perceived as a search for an experience of this nature. Such ethnographic experience is poor. It is personal, individual, and different, which today means insignificant. One has to toil and reduce oneself while waiting for it, without any certainty that it truly took place. The deserts towards which ethnographers set off in search of illumination are not marked on any map because the place where they are perceived depends on a concrete ethnographisation of anthropology. Finally, the pure flash that blinds us has to be expressed and entrusted to language and narration. As in the poem by Miłosz – *What once could smite, now smites no more*. Poor ethnography is itself a poor courtyard, a neglected corner, a lowest ranking reality, a space where we salvage our humanity. This is truly good poverty.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Etnografia – Etnologia – Antropologia kultury – Ludoznawstwo. Czym są? Dokąd zmierzają? (Odpowiedzi na ankietę)*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1981, no. 2, pp. 67-81.
- ² *Etnografia...* op. cit., p. 72.
- ³ I used the following works: C. Geertz, *Zastane światło*, Universitas, Kraków 2006; C. Geertz, *Wiedza Lokalna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2005; C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultury*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2005; C. Geertz, *Dzielo i Życie*, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 2000.
- ⁴ C. Geertz, *Interpretacja kultur*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.
- ⁵ M. Kundera, *Zdradzone testamenty. Esej*, PIW, Warszawa 2003, pp. 115-116.
- ⁶ M. Kundera, *Zasłona*, PIW, Warszawa 2005, pp. 19-21.
- ⁷ T. Kantor, *Wielopole-Wielopole*, Teatr Cricot 2, Program Florencki.
- ⁸ G. Agamben, *Profanacje*, PIW, Warszawa 2006, p. 48.
- ⁹ M. Cwietajewa, *Poemat schodów*, in: M. Cwietajewa, *Być chłopcem twoim jasnowłosym...*, Miniatura, Kraków 2006,

pp. 179-181. Here: transl. by Diana Lewis Burgin, <http://www.dianaburgin.com/>

- ¹⁰ O. Marquard, *O nieodzowności nauk humanistycznych*, in: O. Marquard, *Apologia przypadkowości*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 100-118.
- ¹¹ O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 100.
- ¹² O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 103.
- ¹³ O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 104.
- ¹⁴ O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 105.
- ¹⁵ O. Marquard, op. cit., p. 109.
- ¹⁶ O. Marquard, op. cit., pp. 108-110.
- ¹⁷ G. Vattimo, *Koniec nowoczesności*, Kraków 2006, p. 137 and 147.
- ¹⁸ G. Vattimo, op. cit., pp. 148-152.
- ¹⁹ F. Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii*, Kraków 2004, pp. 223-403.



Of the three circlets lying in front of me two are old coins, blackened, blurred, and with uneven edges. I brought them a long time ago from Mongolia, and although they converged for the first time on my desk they are connected in a very special way.

The first circlet of initiation

This copper coin comes from a bazaar held on Sundays in Ulan Bator. Every week this enormous dusty square in the western periphery on of the town, near the new cemetery (after it was shifted from a picturesque oasis among the last Chinese houses at the foot of the Gandan monastery hill), there appears a crowd of traders, clients, and persons simply examining the great variety of old oddments. A considerable part of the items on sale produces the impression of having been lying around in the streets for six days, and on the seventh day, for reasons totally incomprehensible, suddenly promoted to the role of commodities for sale. As a rule, I rapidly crossed this part of the marketplace and made my way towards a small area where better quality objects are offered. Here, old men dressed not in tacky jackets like the others but in festive Mongolian costumes, sauntered next to a high fence made of boards and showed the jostling commoners - or not, depending on the assessment of the client - a concealed remnant of old silver jewellery with corals and turquoise, an agate or porcelain snuff box, a lamaic icon painted on cloth or, the rarest of all, a brass burkhan.

Today, it is impossible to evoke the atmosphere of those illegal quests. In Mongolia during the early 1970s, a state whose capital not by accident still displayed a statue of Stalin, the possession and flaunting of sacral objects from the domain of the recently quashed lamaic religion were not totally safe either for the sellers or the buyers (chiefly foreigners planning to take

ETHNOLOGIST EN ROUTE

JERZY S. WASILEWSKI

The Secret History of Objects

the purchases out of the country – in those instances, the authorities immediately treated the religious piece as a valuable example of local culture). Such items as snuff boxes could be displayed with greater panache, producing an attachment, concealed on a daily basis, to eliminated and vanishing forms of national culture in which offering snuff as a form of greeting was universally celebrated. The more valuable samples were studied by a huddled group of admirers. When in the afternoons the square grew emptier the old connoisseurs sat in a row next to the fence and, smoking long pipes, showed each other the most precious snuffboxes belonging to them and not necessarily for sale. Pointing their fingers at the details they conducted meticulous debates about the impact exerted on the price by a pattern created by the grains of the stone, the setting of the coral or an insect trapped in the walls of an amber bottle. Jewellery trade of the poor - I thought.

But on that particular day I was drawn to the worse part of the bazaar, to all those petty items and old ware arranged in piles on newspapers lying on the ground. I cannot say why from among scores of such offers I chose this particular chest and in it, underneath a lay-



er of identical rusty screws and used motorcycle spark plugs, I extracted this circlet. I do remember that several years later I was still capable of recalling the magnetic attraction that led me there. Today, I am not certain whether this was not a researcher's ordinary bazaar fever, an urge to examine everything. On the other hand, perhaps something emanating from that spot compelled me to discover the illegible and dirt encrusted coin.

On one side: a tsarist two-headed eagle with an orb and a sceptre in its claws. On the other, contrary to expectations, by no means the bearded profile of Nicholas II; underneath the dirt, scraped off with a fingernail, there emerged the date: 1863-1864 and around it a Cirylic inscription: "Za usmirennye pol'skago miatezha" (For stifling the Polish rebellion).

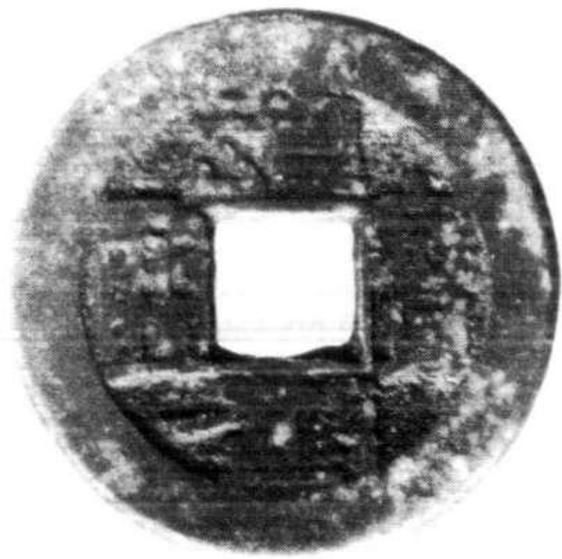
This is not a coin then but a medal for putting down the January Uprising! I recall that Żeromski mentioned it in *Szyfowe prace*. Discovered in a Central Asian bazaar it must, naturally, produce an extremely emotional reaction, astonishment at the good fortune, coincidence, and bond despite such great distances. Only a few would not become excited by such a twist of fate and an object carrying such a plethora of meanings. Right away there ensue speculations about the way in which it could have found itself in Mongolia. The object itself suggests the following possibility: since it is missing an eyelet for hanging it - we can see that it was broken off and the gap hurriedly concealed - it must have been passed off somewhere as a coin. In a tavern along the Kiakhtin route an officer of the Baikal Cossacks escorting traders on their way to Urga carelessly hurled a handful of copper coins onto a damp bar counter...

What about the earlier, Polish stages of this route? Who and for what heroic deed was awarded this medal? Was it for valour, ingenuity or immorality? Perhaps it was granted *za khrabrost* to junker Zubov, a half-

blood Circassian but a *dzhigit* of extraordinary courage and fierceness, who after a victorious skirmish somewhere along the roads of northern Mazovia confronted a group of insurgents and chased its three young commanders to a manor house. Here, they hid in a maiden's room on the upper storey. Zubov rushed in with a Cossack, a salvo was fired, all the bullets struck the doorframe, and the inferior gunmen were slashed by shashka sabres ...

Or was it presented for wartime skill to Dukmanov, officer and veteran of the Crimean War, experienced in battles waged in the Caucasus, who in the Augustów gubernia cleverly defended wagons carrying ammunition, and having caught a local inhabitant used a knout to extract information about the route of the rebels. Dukmanov first did not understand why the captive was babbling about sheepskin coats, but finally realised that he was being told the names of the villages where the insurgents were to receive supplies in the form of ... sheepskin coats. The trap ended with a bloody massacre. Much later, both Zubov and Dukmanov were transferred to Transbaikal as part of constant translocations within the Empire.

Wartime valour was, however, rewarded rather with the Cross of St. Andrew, presented also for other merits: loyalty to the ruler, cooperation with legitimate authorities, eager introduction of the new order. Perhaps it was received by Vogt Krasko from the region of Kowno, who was kindly permitted to choose: either the village was to be burned down and all its inhabitants exiled somewhere near the border with Turkestan, or he could organize a Muraviov rural guard, denounce the agitators, and assist in catching the last survivors of the Uprising wandering in the forests. It was he, with a medal granted for being able to force even Polish landowners to sign loyalty declarations and probably for catching someone of great importance and later hanged in Wilno, who left as a



voluntary émigré for the steppes on the Baikal, where land was for the taking. Strange, he did not choose Vershina but preferred to settle down even further, all the way next to the Chinese cordon.

Why am I thinking of all those scenario episodes? Would an academic study on an artefact contain such imaginary visions, which quite a few items are capable of easily evoking? All those stories about a single bullet, a yellow shoe, the sofa of a Gestapo officer and countless other objects – would it not be better to leave them as material for a literary construction? In science I am dissatisfied with idiography alone and grow bored with stringing facts on the single thread of chronology without reconstructing wider and more abstract patterns – configurations and relations, model-like solutions and systemic dependencies.

Ethnography must be also realistic – otherwise it would not be itself at all. Although in my earlier research I treated an object almost exclusively as a representation of a certain intellectual system (envisaging it as a text, a carrier of symbols, a correlate of beliefs and imaginings, a consolidated record of an intellectual or social system), in a more extensive presentation I do not intend to be satisfied with a systemic, synchronic dimension. Let it contain a threat of diachrony so that the concrete individual history of things would not be lost; the same holds true for the history of the people in whose hands those items found themselves and into whose genealogies they became intertwined.

A place where I specially miss such information is the ethnographic museum. In these storehouses of things all the extra-material contexts or backdrops of an artefact are restricted. More, the unique is intentionally and in a programme-like manner omitted. Looking at an item we shall not find out anything about its individual history, past, and meaning for all those who handled it – from the producer to the collector who had extracted it from its contexts and inserted it into his text, thus granting it new meanings and endowing it with different emotions. Show me the fate of a concrete work of human ingenuity before it became part of an exhibition, frozen beneath glass as yet another exhibit.¹

Only a small regional museum or a memorial room are not ashamed to offer such information. And even if the guidebook does not disclose it we are forced to resort to our imagination.

One has to set into motion a certain “hermeneutic of things” and open up towards the language of the object. To do so one does not have to be a collector, albeit owning a collection does facilitate the process of opening up, especially if it takes place in special circumstances. The object possesses power. It is merely necessary to cross its path and it will compel us to listen to its story. Then we shall view also other items differently. Time to take a look at the second coin.

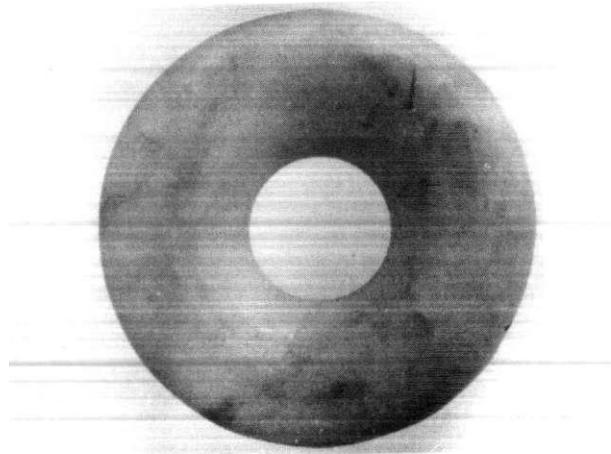
The second circlet of initiation

This is already a genuine coin. Brass, with Chinese and Uighur symbols around a square opening in the middle - the opening was used to string coins for the sake of thesaurisation, to braid them into hair, and to sew them on as a decoration of clothes. Just like all coins out of circulation it could serve assorted practical purposes, e.g. as the ending of a rope used for tying a lamaic book. The addition (to one or several linked coins) of a piece of sheep wool created a pompon of sorts with a weight. It was used for playing a game of *tebek*, consisting of kicking it in the air time and again, similarly as the game of *zoška* played in Warsaw courtyards and playgrounds.

I recall that when I played *zoška* I was intrigued by its name. After all, it has nothing in common with the principles of the game or its technique, and we do not know the identity of the mysterious woman after whom it was named. I read somewhere that it was used already in ancient Rome - the game was mentioned by one of the Plinys. Perhaps this is the source? But then there was no Latin counterpart of the Greek name: Sophia (which could have been the eventual source of our native *Zoška*). The origin of the name – and the game – thus remained a mystery until I came across its Mongolian counterpart.

In Mongolian this copper coin is known as *dzos*, which literally means “copper”. In Buryat pronunciation it becomes *zos*, but even if I had earlier thought about it I would have never associated *zos* with the Polish *zoška* owing to the thousands of kilometres separating these forms both linguistically and geographically. Now I come across information that renders this connection credible.

Grigoriy Nikolayevich Potanin recounted (referring to approximately the mid-nineteenth century) that cadets of the military academy in the West Siberian town of Omsk used to play a game called *zoška*.² Eureka! Since *zoška* was recorded in Siberia in a version that has no meaning in Russian (it is not mentioned in any dictionary and the name as such does not occur in Russian) then it must have been borrowed from the



Buryats (a suggestion made by the author, thus dispelling our doubts about the long distance from Buryatia to Omsk). Since the Buryat word did not sound natural in Russian an ending was added to make declination easier, thus creating *zoska*.

The familiar *zoska* was, therefore, originally a Mongolian and Buryat copper coin with the intermediary of a Russian semantic form. I already know who brought it to Poland: speaking metaphorically, it was the same graduates of the Omsk and Irkutsk military academies who were sent to conduct *usmirenyye pol'skogo miatezha*, and who later returned with medals. We are already familiar with this route – someone who had discovered in that part of the world the first copper coin, material proof of contact between the distant steppe and Mazovia, immediately becomes convinced that the second circlet also traversed an identical path at the same time and travelling with the same people. A material object - as tangible as possible – suffices as evidence of the genuine nature of such a hypothetical reconstruction.

There is no greater joy for a researcher than when an event he personally experienced leads towards some sort of a scientific discovery or finding. There is also no greater temptation than to succumb to this allure. Our model, however, must be the crafty Odysseus, whose intellect and strong will power prevented him from listening to the seductive and confusing voices of the Sirens. To what mast of scepticism must we tie ourselves in order to sail safely and cautiously towards true discoveries? While building scientific hypotheses are we capable of getting rid of the temptation to connect facts that became linked in our daily life in which research is, after all, immersed? Can we protect ourselves against the outright "compulsion to built associations" that renders us blind to the fact that certain relations do not exist "really", but in the manner of Ruskin's beauty are only "in the eye of the beholder"?

So many classification, periodisations, reconstructions, and models show facts in some sort of an association and grouping not because this is the way they are connected organically but because thanks to that procedure all corresponds in the author's scientific bookkeeping. No finding, thing or piece of information can remain useless, superfluous or un-interpreted. Everything has its place, all matches in a learned construction simply because this is the way it is associated by the researcher, offering him a pleasant feeling of order and harmony.

A single pebble suffices to topple this psychological construction, this synthesis of truth and falsehood - a harsh warning to never complete a given theory (construct, model).

A single book suffices as long as it is the right one. Take the example of *Zly* by Leopold Tyrmand: so

many details about Warsaw of the 1950s, an outright ethnography of the town. There is even information about games, which before the war included *pliszki*, *cymbergaj* and others, but not *zoska*, which appeared immediately after the war.

Who brought it? It was not the Baikal Cossacks of the Uprising era, after all? Am I, therefore, forced to abandon the image of Russian soldiers playing *v zosku* and watched by Polish children? This is already more than I can bear – the power of both metal circlets is much too great. I shall thus continue holding on to the conviction that it was the soldiers who came from the East, naturally not tsarist soldiers but Red Army men. If, and this is quite possible, I come across signals that *zoska* was played already before the war (although not necessarily in Warsaw) I shall willingly return to the earlier hypothesis. One way or another, regardless of the proposed dates, nothing will topple my opinion that the game arrived together with the army. The proof provided by both objects is simply much too strong.

The third circlet - the third lesson

This object too has an aperture, although it is no longer a copper coin but a slightly larger jade circle with greenish veins, flattened, thin, and with an inner orifice with rounded edges. And nothing more.

We may only surmise that this is a Chinese product; at any rate, the Mongols never pursued this craft. Otherwise, there is no information (unless its steep price would comprise some sort of substitute data). Ideal simplicity, the absence of any sort of stylistic features, patterns, incisions or even a knob. Nor is there any point of departure for suppositions about origin, age, purpose or even current usage. A small enigma, a mysterious monolith, a mute child of anonymous parents, a Kaspar Hauser puzzle.

The silence of this object provokes. In the cultural reality of Central Asia one may assume, for all practical purposes, only a single function - that of an ornament. Could this have been an accessory for a snuff pouch, a weight making it easier to hang the latter on a belt? Mongolian accessories, similarly as their better-known Japanese counterparts, *netsuke*, were, as a rule, figural. Perhaps then this is some sort of an embellishment of a woman's festive costume? In that case it should feature an ornament, a flower, a decorative detail.

Can a sensible conclusion be drawn from sheer silence? Is the meaning of an object determined by the fact that it has no visible sign telling us something about its identity? Or perhaps one should turn this deficiency into a virtue and recall that the extremely ascetic nature of an object could serve the embodiment of abstract values: the ideal, the absolute, the transcendent. Not by accident were such stone and bronze circlets featuring intriguing simplicity known

in China already during antiquity. Quite possibly the same property that was decisive for their power at that time grants them value when they are smuggled from former imperial collections to make their way onto the antiques market. If the original old case with imperial seals also survived then it will act as legible guarantee that it was precisely this object whose power fascinated rulers of ancient dynasties. It will be presented by one of the great auction houses in London or Hong Kong at an auction held especially for this single artefact, described as a “very important ritual disc (bi)”.

The simplest shapes and objects best materialize eternity - regardless whether they are small circles made of shells, about whose past so much was known by the Trobrianders, or monstrous circles from other islands of the South Seas, veritable mill stones exerting magnetic attraction even in an antique shop in the capital of one of the former colonial powers.

Power belongs not only to lavish, luxurious, and beautiful objects. True, they too provide an awareness of contact with transcendence. When touring a cathedral treasury or a museum adjoining an Eastern rite church and looking at an exceptional golden pectoral or a church cross with a knob I envision how a dying cardinal or an archimandrite grasped it on his deathbed so that he might feel it with his fingers while thinking that the Saviour was not abandoning him. On the other hand, when I handle a pair of imposing, massive, and sophisticated ritual knives I know just how a person performing a lamaic sacrifice must have felt during a ceremony of ousting evil by offering a man-shaped kukla, the *dzolig*. Paraphernalia are a powerful guarantee of the might of each religious act.

Naturally, this force belongs only to a genuine object and not some sort of purchase, the outcome of a short-lived adventure in a supermarket born out of a fleeting relationship between the client and the great whore of the market. We know that an object-gadget will make its way across our home in a crowd of others, along the path between the shopping cart and the garbage bin. A genuine object is immortal. A copper plate hurled into a fire during a potlatch will be remembered for long. Iconoclasts, hunveibins, Savonarolas, Atilias and fashionistas who tell us not to wear the design of the past season will be always about. But it is the thing that ultimately is our only eternity. A well-known aphorism maintaining that man is an episode in the history of an object produces a collector's spontaneous protest that is lesser than that of others.

Things compel us to think about eternity in both directions – focused on the future and longevity, on the past and eternity. Just like the silver baptismal bowl commemorating seven generations of the Cas-torp family and evoking in the young Hans *a strange, dreamy, troubling sense: of change in the midst of dura-*

*tion, of time as both flowing and persisting, of recurrence in continuity.*³

In order to enroot us in the past the object too must be well embedded in it. This is why the sign of the producer is so important - the author's signature, the stamp of a workshop, the thin engraved initials of clockmakers repairing an old mechanism, or the numbers written with a carpenter's thick pencil at the bottom of commode drawers so that they would fit better. Enrootment in a cultural context is decisive for identity. An old Turkmenian carpet possesses stylistic features enabling its identification not only with the Ersari tribal group but also with the region of the small town of Dali on the Amu Darya, where it was executed; a contemporary Afghani carpet does not provide the observer with an opportunity for tracing its lineage – it is a collection of patterns, of which each once belonged to some other clan and defined a concrete and different provenance.

Thanks to things we also focus on the future. It is things that force the collector to think about his heirs, successors, and future observers. By enrooting us in the past and growing into the future they expand our personality and cultural identity. Someone who does not wish to limit himself to an identity *emploi* determined by family tradition and its mementoes can build a different identity out of objects he had personally collected.⁴ It is possible to free oneself from the restraints of own culture and horizon of behaviour. By collecting *exotica* I touch the reality of the most distant past and contact with Chinese artefacts enables me to withdraw into the past as far as possible. While drinking tea at a low table, which once was an “opium bed” in a Chinese opium den, I do not become a Chinese from the past but find it easier to imagine that I am entering that world.

Contrary to the acclaimed alternative: “To be or to have” I insist that “to have” (a collection of things) carries the same spiritual value as “to be” (a collector of things).

Endnotes

- ¹ As recalled by Scandinavian ethnology – see: e.g. L. Otto, L. Pedersen, *Collecting oneself. Life stories and objects of memory*, “Ethnologia Scandinavica”, vol. 28, 1998, pp. 77-92.
- ² G. N. Potanin, *Ocherki severo-zapadnoy Mongolii*, Sankt Peterburg 1881, p. 120.
- ³ T. Mann, *Czarodziejska góra*, Warszawa 1956, p. 48.
- ⁴ A review of such contemporary attitudes towards souvenirs in: B. Rogan, *Things with a history - and other possessions*, “Ethnologia Scandinavica”, vol. 28, 1998, pp. 93-107. Ibid. basic literature for “material culture” thus comprehended by contemporary Anglo-Saxon anthropology.

People of the Taiga, the Reindeer People, the People...

... Darkness pervades the shamanic yurt. A huddled figure - perhaps the shaman's wife or his young helper - holds a massive drum above the dying flames of the fire. The shaman sits slightly further, with the figurines of the deities of the home altar behind him. His eyes are shut (...) the quiet murmur of a prayer is heard. Suddenly, he stands up, takes hold of the drum, and testing it strikes it; the sound is still insufficiently loud - it has been raining the whole day and the leather on the rim is moist and must be dried for a long time. Those sitting on both sides observe him tensely...." ¹

When more than a quarter of century ago I began my book on shamanism with the above quotation I never even hoped that I should ever see such a scene myself. Much has changed since the time of Feliks Kon and other authors from the turn of the nineteenth century on whose accounts I based my descriptions. In the Siberian and Mongolian stretch of taiga and tundra there appeared a system that obliterated or modified the archaic ways of existence, changed tents, teepees and yurts into wooden barracks and cottages, transformed the shepherds into kolkhoz tractor drivers, and eliminated all shamans. And yet, I am witnessing today a recurrence of an ancient image: a shamanic séance in a cramped teepee, held for a few shepherds. The shaman looks just the same as his counterpart did years ago: he wears an identical costume, rocks back and forth, and murmurs in an unchanged manner, his daughter dries the drum above the fire just like it was done years ago because today it rained as it did then, not surprisingly since the Eastern Sayan Mts. are a range where it always rains.

The Tuva/Tukha/Tsaatan people of northern Mongolia had completed a full circle - they returned to reindeer grazing, living in yurts and teepees, and to shamanism.

We are on the edges of the Darkhad Valley, known as the land of the shamans. Here flows the Shishged River, further down known as the Yenisei. This is almost the end of the world and we shall travel on horseback even further, north of the last permanent settlement: Tsagaan-nuur, towards the frontier with Russia, or, more precisely, with South Siberian Tuva. This territory, once known as Uriankhai, has been the domain of rivalry between Russia

and China, embroiled in a competition for hegemony in Asia intent on transferring Mongolia from the Asian axis to the European one. Here, boundaries were never clear-cut - hence the multiplicity of misleading names given to the inhabitants of the forest-steppe borderline by the Mongols, the Russians, and the Chinese: the Uriankhai, the Soyot, the Uyghur, the Tuva (pronounced by the locals as Tukha and for some reasons transcribed in current Western literature as Dukha), and the Tsaatan. Today, the latter, Mongolian name signifying "people of the reindeer" is best known, although unwillingly accepted by those concerned. The Tsaatan are not a Mongolian people but of Turkic origin: native Tuvinians, who fled from their homeland to Mongolia only half a century ago.

Not many remember that until 1944 there existed a state known as the Republic of Tuva - a pseudo-independent buffer between the USSR and Mongolia, a region of interests pursued by two other Far Eastern rivals: China and Japan. Its symbolic independence came down to post stamps (triangles and rhombi featuring shepherds and milkmaids with sheep, cows, and camels). When at the end of the war Stalin ultimately incorporated Tuva into the Soviet Union, famine and enforced army recruitment followed. The post-stamp shepherds started to flee across the frontier - a feat accomplished the easiest by breeders of small reindeer herds, who had earlier penetrated the mountainous borderland.

After several years of compulsory returns and repeated attempts at escape, several hundred Tuvinians were permitted to stay in Mongolia, where in 1956 they were granted citizenship, while an ensuing adaptation policy assumed the form of acculturation or outright assimilation. The nomadic shepherds were settled down and some became fishermen and employees of a fish processing plant; it is worth recalling that neither they nor the Mongols fished or ate fish ever before.

Forest culture was an embarrassment to the progressive authorities, which regarded local shamanism as a particular disgrace. This is why foreign researchers were so rarely permitted to tour these regions, as we experienced personally a quarter of century ago while arriving with an expedition organised by the Polish Academy of Sciences. We were driven out after being accused of acting as Intelligence agents working for the Japanese; a suspicious janitor saw us using candles at night - evidently, we had been developing espionage film negatives.

The events of the 1990s changed the mentality of the local decision makers and transformed it beyond recognition. This borderland region opened up not only for researchers and tourists but also for all the more and less fortunate consequences of a systemic transformation. The fish processing plant finally went bankrupt (since no one ate the fish) and the reindeer kolkhoz was disbanded, its members somehow managed to slaughter more than half of the herd just in time before privatisation and all funds for additionally financing animal hus-

bandry vanished as did those for constructing houses and farm buildings, veterinary assistance, and schools.

Such were the conditions of an onset of inevitable regress towards tradition as the sole possible form of survival. Once again teepees covered with torn tarpaulin had to suffice together with small – 20-40 animals per family – herds of reindeer and scarce products of the taiga as an additional source of sustenance. Preserved remnants of indigenous culture included tradition, spirituality, and shamanism.

2.

We await the beginning of the séance in a dark teepee, just before midnight. The not quite fifty years-old Gandzorig is the youngest but the most active of four Tsaatan shamans. He slowly arranges his costume, roomy calf boots, and a black-feather headband. All resemble items shown in old engravings, although they had been made only three years ago and are kept inside a large and capacious drum (a researcher cannot help noticing with satisfaction that this is a proper “south Sayan” drum according to the Prokofieva classification). The front part of the costume imitates armour (a breastplate with horizontal bands) and the back is embellished with long ribbons, including one in the distinct shape of a snake. The shaman’s daughter, assisting in the séance, still has to sew on the last iron tags, which for reasons unknown have to be placed anew before each séance. Opposite the entrance there hangs in the place of honour a half-metre long sash displaying pieces of fabric and figurines made of fabric and leather. These are the shaman’s holy objects – *ongons* prepared by his older brother, Gost, who until recently was also a regular shaman. Later I shall describe the encounter with this celebrated figure of local shamanism.

It is nearly midnight. The daughter lights a candle and places it behind a bed sheet screen, producing an excellent stage design effect. Silence falls and everyone succumbs to solemn concentration. We are accompanied by a young married couple quietly explaining in the Tuvian language the reason for their presence – apparently, they are childless. Now it is my turn to present our wishes – I ask for successful work, and a happy return home. I feel like yet another member of a long sequence of European researchers studying Siberia - travellers and exiles who resorted to the same motivation to mask their curiosity that led them to the site of a shamanic rite.

3.

We set off across the land of the Tsaatan on eight horses: the four of us (two Polish and two Mongol researchers), two guides, and two pack horses, carrying provisions for us and our hosts so as to prevent them from killing reindeer for meat. Apart from flour, rice, canned goods, and pressed tea our supplies include flashlights, candles, and ropes for tying reindeer; we could do with

more medicines, shoes for children, tarpaulin for covering the teepees.... .

It is October, the 3 000 meters-high peaks of the Sayan Mts. on the horizon are already capped with snow, and temperatures - especially at night - are well below zero. The horses take fright while carefully stepping over the ice-covered streams, but at least they do not sink in “black water”, which in the summer hampers all movement in the taiga. The laboriously traversed passes offer views of a frozen, still landscape. Not a single trace of man – kilometers of yellowed larch taiga covering the dome shaped summits and the sprawling grassy valleys. Even the Tungus meteorite would not make an impression here.

The taiga displays yet another colour, i.e. black. This is not solely the effect of the natural process of the larches turning dark - larch is aptly called “the black tree”. In many places one can see traces of local forest fires caused by lightning. Our guides secure the remnants of a bonfire, carefully covering it with sheets of ice from a frozen stream. This does not come as a surprise - there is only a single method of combatting fire: the intervention of an owner of a magic stone known as *dzada*, whose exposure to wind immediately brings rain. This special item comes from the bowels of a stag and is an ossified fur ball just like *bezoar*, the magic stone in mediaeval European tradition. The magic anti-fire campaign is, by the way, financed by the local authorities.

Only rarely do we encounter traces of human presence: an *ovoo* - a pile of branches with strands of hair obtained from a horse or reindeer mane, and traces of small sacrifices for the spirits of those sites, a *khadag* - a blue sash hanging on a branch as a sign that nearby a human corpse had been placed on the ground, or a horse skull nailed onto a tree to guarantee the birth of good stallions.

Here and there we can see that shamanic practices and beliefs live on. We pass shaman’s trees full of ribbons, the destination of those wishing to make a sacrifice on this spot and whose relatives included a shaman. We see reindeer with colourful ribbons around their necks – these are blessed animals excused from hard labour; women are forbidden to mount them. The ribbons – the same as those hanging in the place of honor in a teepee as holy objects – are the seat of the guardian spirits of the family, and the reindeer are their carriers.

During our journey we encounter a lone rider transporting a small load. He looks strange, as if he was carrying only part of his belongings. The mystery was explained once we arrived at the camp from which he had departed.

Everyone is preparing for tomorrow’s joint transference to a new site near the winter grazing land. Such a day has to be astronomically providential for all - and it is by no means easy to establish it for more than ten families in the camp. The feat is almost accomplished, but for one family this is still an unlucky day. The only solution is

magic: the departure has to be staged on another day by dispatching a single family member; then the others will follow with the rest.

This is where we shall spend the night. As always when staying in someone's teepee we are not allowed to throw even the smallest piece of paper into the fire - this would be an offence against the household fire, causing a rash on the faces of all the residents. We can only helplessly watch our hostess putting outside our clean paper wrappings, which could have been burnt without leaving a single trace. Even more the pity considering that in this environment they will litter the taiga for years to come. This is a case of an insoluble conflict of the attitudes, reasons, and values of the East and the West, perhaps equally justified but also mutually exclusive.

When we finally go to sleep our host removes from the wall all *ongons* – ribbons, small pieces of fur, iron embellishments, and figurines so that, he explains, the spirits would not torment us at night and bring bad dreams.

4.

Gandzorig puts on his costume, treating each part with the smoke of a burning juniper branch and deeply inhaling the smoke. He tries out the drum, first quietly and calmly, facing the fire in the centre, and then with his back turned to us and looking at the *ongons*. Standing predominantly in this position he dances for several hours during the séance.

After the first six-eight minutes the drum is beaten regularly. Now, two rhythms will resound uninterruptedly, interchangeably, and in long sequences: rapid series of 166-180 beats a minute – a typical trance-inducing shamanic rhythm, and double beats imitating the noise of a galloping horse. This goes on tirelessly for over two hours - when his hand gets tired of producing one of the rhythms Gandzorig chooses the second tempo. He hums something quietly, in a changed and unnaturally whining voice. The words are illegible and on the next day he is unable to, or does not want to explain anything to us. Sometimes he cries out, huddle, and using his hands gathers something into the drum open on one side. He wheezes and snorts, as if he were a bird soaring in the air or a steed. This otherworldly flight is also rendered by running on the spot, dynamic motions of the body, and jumping on both feet. A quarter of an hour after falling into the trance he sits down for less than a minute and his daughter hands him a pipe. During successive brief intervals he sips tea or puffs on a cigarette.

More than half an hour of the unflagging dance has passed and the shaman is clearly losing control over his motions; he is prevented from falling on his back by the men sitting nearby who catch him and protect him from hurting himself against an iron stove. Now, we have to pay attention so while whirling rapidly he does not get one of the ribbons entangled on the stove pipe. He no longer controls his movements because he is being entered by

the supreme *ongon*; the only thing we know about it is that it is a female.

One of the spectators ties to the shaman's back a white sash – the *khadag*, a gift that is supposed to win over the *ongon*. Perhaps now the conversation with the spirit will take place and produce divination for those gathered? No, Gandzorig rarely resorts to this method and usually the fortune telling involves interpreting the location of a drum rattle thrown to each of the participants twice: the first time one has to catch it with one's hand and give it back while saying: "divination!" (*torog!*), with the handle turned towards the ; the second time it should be caught without touching the object, into one's lap, and the shaman, having looked at the position of the rattle, makes a longer statement assuring about its conducive effect.

The *ongon* leaves the shaman's body; at the same time, the flight of his soul comes to an end. Those present comment that now the shaman "is descending to earth". He slowly grows calm and takes off the attire without help, although he staggers. One of the men gives him a brief massage, and the son leads the shaman – undressed and hot – outside; in a few minutes he returns refreshed. He adds that he did not wish to exhaust us, the foreigners, with an overly long séance, which could last for five hours. When we leave for our tent it is almost three in the morning.

5.

A day in the teepee always begins with making tea. Today too we are awakened by a familiar sound – our hostess uses a steel chisel to scrape the tea leaves pressed into a hard brick and kept in a leather pouch, and then pounds them into powder in a wooden mortar. We warm up, chilled despite the warm sleeping bags, and listen to what our hosts are saying: that the children found it so hot at night that they went to sleep outside, on the ground, and that the adults too would be unable to sleep in a bed in a room in some town. In addition, it is high time to begin the slaughter.

Slaughtering a reindeer starts with tying down the dogs. The barely five year-old Budzen' with a constantly surprised expression on her face and her older brother secure the two shaggy creatures, still covered with hoar frost, to trees so that that they would not disturb us. Our host has already separated the chosen animal from the rest of the herd. He carries an axe and a long home made bayonet – an irregularly shaped piece of iron in a wooden sheath. Now, he sends his little daughter to fetch his knife, the one with a clasp made of a boar fang, which he always wears tied to his belt and today has supposedly forgotten and left behind in the teepee. By the time the girl returns the whole operation has been completed: the reindeer, stunned by the axe on the head, has fallen to the ground and his heart has been stabbed with the bayonet deeply piercing the neck. Lying on its side, the animal

kicks and is pressed by the boy from the rear so that dark thick blood flows into a bowl.

The little girl watches while the two men skin the reindeer starting with the pasterns, slashing through the belly, extracting the full stomach, cutting off the liver and serving everyone a slice of warm, sweetish, meat. The dogs calmly wait for their portion of inferior entrails. In not quite half an hour the pantry beams are full of pieces of the meat of a whole reindeer, while the ribs and the heart are being cooked for immediate consumption.

It was not easy to make the decision to kill the animal. The whole herd is not even thirty strong, but our host's wife is very weak, she recently miscarried, and the meat should give her strength. Asked when he had last slaughtered a reindeer our host becomes angry. He is well aware that reducing the size of the paltry herd leads to nowhere but the family has to eat something.

This is the prime problem faced by these people – the dilemma: to slay the reindeer or not. The animals constitute the foundation of their sustenance and not by accident are recorded in the Mongolian name of the ethnic group. The several hundred strong Tsaatan community and its specific culture will survive under the condition that it does not kill off the reindeer. The number of the animals is falling and today totals about 700, and the lack of fresh blood means inbreeding together with all its negative consequences.

In addition, the herds are weakened by the procedure of cutting off the antlers. In the spring, the antlers, which grow back each year, are still soft because they are richly supplied with blood and in this state – similarly to the famous Siberian stag horns - they have been used for centuries by traditional Chinese medicine and, more recently, European medicine. At the beginning of the summer Chinese merchants appear in the region, willing to trade in bearskins and other products of the taiga, such as mushrooms; in turn, they offer money, quickly exchanged for vodka. In those conditions it becomes tempting to once again cut off the antlers when they are growing back before autumn, a procedure that exceptionally weakens the animals and leads to infections and a degeneration of the antlers. Consequently, the herds include a growing number of deteriorated animals - our Father Christmas would be ashamed to use them for his sleigh.

Everyone is supposedly aware of this, but it just so happened that in each cluster of the teepees we came across fresh meat and the heads of the reindeer displayed bloody wounds in place of the antlers.

6.

Does the reader recall the titular character of the Siberian hunter from a film by Akira Kurosawa, a man called *Dersu Uzala*? This part was played by Maxim Bulduk, an actor from Tuva – the land of shepherds located some 3 000 kms to the west from the site of the plot. Now, I

am no longer astonished at the extraordinary ease with which he performed the role of a man of the taiga.

The Tsaatan are masters of the hunt. A young man with a gun, who quietly whistling rides a reindeer next to us, manages to shoot in the blink of an eye an edible dormouse in a tree, and still on horseback skins its glistening black fur. He laughs with glee because it is worth 5 000 tugriks (almost five dollars) and is the source of additional meat. When the newly fallen snow is so deep that even reindeer sink to their bellies he will put on primitive home-made skis - long, wide, heavy larch beams fastened with leather straps and with the hide of freshly skinned reindeer attached to the bottom.

These are the natural born people of the taiga, a name - *taigynkhyn* – that the Tsaatan use most often to describe themselves.

Before leaving, the residents of the campsite say farewell to the holy mountain, thanking it for a well-spent autumn. We are not permitted to take part in this rite but upon return they show us the strange pebbles they brought back. Smooth, regularly shaped, and with light brown swirls, they supposedly lie scattered as if in stone bowls. It pleases the mountain that they are taken in return for something that has to be left behind, even if it is only a piece of white fabric. The mountain grudgingly gives bad people only the smallest pebbles.

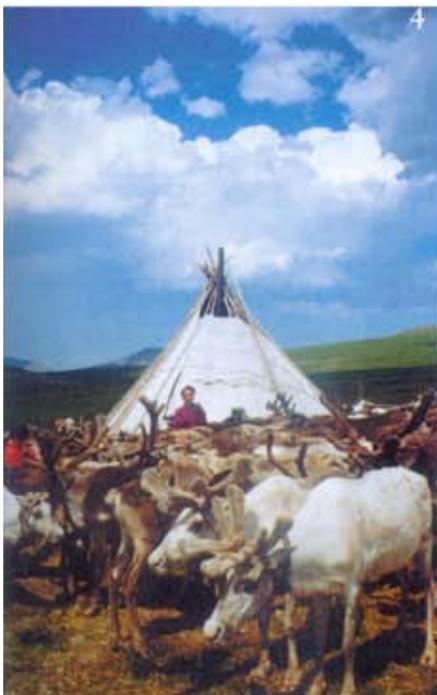
We set off on our way. Mounting the steep approaches we reach the passes only to laboriously guide the easily frightened horses down. We cross couloirs covered with rock scree, places that are so wild and devoid of people that if *almas* - the local version of the yeti - were to live somewhere in Mongolia this would be the location. Our hosts, although recounting legends about the *almas*, do not believe in its existence. They are most of all afraid of bears, which can be fatally dangerous especially if the summer season did not provide abundant berries and ants and the hungry animal cannot fall asleep for the winter.

We listen to the story of a man whose whole family was killed by such a famished bear. Having returned together with his wife to the teepee where they left a small child in the care of its granny, they found the mauled remnants of the corpses cast together with household utensils into the fireplace in the centre of the building, as if the bear wished to set all afire and obliterate the traces of the attack. The wife suffered a heart attack, which she survived, but never managed to eliminate the depression that after two years of suffering resulted in suicide. At the end of the meeting the man, who since that time lives alone, asked us to sign our names in a notebook in which he collects the names of all his visitors.

Only after a longer stay we were told in secret that universal belief has it that the calamity must have been brought about by a black shaman from Tuva, who for reasons unknown sent the bear. After all, there could be no other explanation for the fact that the animal passed



1. Departing for wood. Photo Lech Mróz
2. Atarma, Delgermagnay's wife. Photo Lech Mróz
3. Batzayaa leaving for the hunt. Photo Lech Mróz
4. The herd is back in the camp. Photo Lech Mróz
5. Old lady in front of her tepee. Photo Lech Mróz





6



7



8

6. Suyaan and her old shamanic drum. Photo Lech Mróz
7. Half-blind Tsend fortune-telling with 41 pebbles. Photo Lech Mróz
8. Ganzorig with his newly made paraphernalia. Photo Lech Mróz

by all the other teepees and carried out such a carefully planned attack.

7.

I sincerely admire the researchers of yore capable of gathering so much material about esoteric shamanism. They managed to overcome barriers and distances created by distrust and alienness, decipher enigmatic symbols, reconstruct the whole pantheon, and outline a model of the world.

I was unable to attain this objective among the Tsaatans and local shamanism still remains a mystery. I was even incapable of resolving the question concerning the extent to which the shamans, declining to answer, conceal that, which must remain taboo or are concerned with preserving the aura of mystery required from the commercial point of view while additionally masking their incomplete knowledge of tradition.

Gandzorig forbids taking photographs in the course of the séance (and limits the number of photographs that we are permitted to take the next day to four). He also refuses to speak about any details of his art – initiation, training or the chanted texts, claiming that songs appear during the séance and that otherwise he is completely unfamiliar with them. He seems to be somewhat afraid of the anger of the spirits and even more so of his older brother, Gost.

Gost ceased being a shaman quite recently – I suspect that he simply lost faith while observing the manner in which this art is becoming crude. He is stern and reticent – several years ago he had the reputation of a “black shaman”, the sort that could harm his foes and be commissioned to cast a fatal spell. *The ongon no longer comes to him* – reveals his sister. He refuses to speak about this and condemns the commercialisation of shamanism in its popular version, a process spreading among the Mongols. After years of illegally practicing shamanism, for which he was imprisoned, he still has too much respect for the spirits to reach for a drum since he no longer believes in the effectiveness of such activity.

The doyenne of the Tsaatan shamans is the 98 year-old Su-yaan. Although she still threads a needle without using spectacles, she is not longer able – as she did only a few years ago – to conduct hours long séances that demand a constant beating of a drum and dancing, ecstatic leaps, and the singing and recitation of texts. *My head no longer remembers a single thing, I have forgotten all the prayers.*

Two years ago, however, the sight of aged Suyaan wearing a costume almost as old as she, and getting ready for a shaman séance signified a meeting with an entirely different world. The cap-plume, the long tunic with jangling accessories, the high boots with sewn-on likenesses of bird's claws, and the large drum with a blurred image of either a human figure or a tree must have survived concealed somewhere. With the help of her daughter-in-law the old woman reverently treated all the parts of the cos-

tume and the drum with incense smoke and sprinkled the *ongons* using a juniper branch dipped in sacrificial milk. From a wooden box she took out a drymba (Jew's harp) – an iron instrument, which played with the lips produces a quiet vibrating sound, allowing the spirits to travel great distances. The arrival of the main spirit, the “lord of *ongons*”, made it possible to decipher the prediction. Twice in a row the instrument hurled on the ground fell with the tongue upward. This was a good sign.

The shaman got up, reached for a large drum made for her when she was still a young woman (it cost one reindeer), and started to lightly strike it with a wand and quietly hum. She skipped, turned around once and twice, and rhythmically shook her head so that the braids covering her face trembled. Old age, however, takes its toll: Suyaan did not complete the whole ritual, rapidly finished it by sprinkling tea in front of the teepee and through its upper opening – an offering for the local spirits.

Her daughter, the kind-hearted, blind Tsend, arranges a genuine shamanic séance only once every three months, but readily tells our fortune to see whether our return trip will succeed. In the manner of all fortune-tellers in Central Asia she uses 41 pebbles arranged in piles. Subsequently, she picks them up and in a gesture of prayer holds them next to her face, rearranges them over and over again in three rows (each composed of three piles), brings them together and once again arranges them. *Your legs are light, nothing bad will occur along your way, the personal fate of each of you is auspicious*, but at the end she adds that while returning we should avoid a solitary yurt, otherwise we shall encounter a “slight obstacle”. Her son, watching the course of the fortune telling and the configuration of the pebbles, confirms the warning.

Heedless of the divination, on our way back we ate dinner in a lone yurt. Several hours later, just before entering the town, our jeep was stopped by the militia: it turned out that the driver did not have a license; if we had arrived just a few hour earlier we could have saved ourselves a lot of trouble.

Predictions can be more or less down to earth, but despite appearances a shamanic séance is not merely rendered service. To my astonishment, this rule is observed by the praxis of old Tsaatan shamans. None had ever been commissioned to tell fortune, and the ritual is performed only on certain days several times a year. Even the sick, arriving for a cure, were expected to wait for that particular day – a séance in their intention could take place solely during their absence. Gandzorig's daughter explains, in secret from her father, that when spirits come to him they ask why they had been summoned and could punish him for having beckoned them for petty reasons.

This information is at odds with my heretofore image of shamanism as an intervention praxis focused on *ad hoc* assistance rendered to a person suffering from spiritual, psychic or physical disability. I am incapable of sufficiently verifying it and coming to terms with the conclusion

that in the case of intense research conducted in a small community where the number of interlocutors is slight and each person presents his own, complicated history it is difficult to achieve tested, infallible generalisations. There are no effective theses and diagnoses concerning trends and no facile sweeping statements. Tsend, Gost, Sandzhin, Bayaraa, Ganbat and others are concrete persons representing individual experiences, knowledge, and opinions as well as ignorance, forgetfulness, and doubts that only multiply my questions and uncertainties.

8.

The people of the taiga are scarce: only forty families breed reindeer in the mountains and over ten are gradually adopting Mongolian-style husbandry: they descend to the dells where instead of the sickly reindeer they keep more resilient cattle and sheep and move from the teepees to warm felt yurts. Young men marry Mongolian girls. This influx of new blood pleases the parents, but the young brides anxiously await the moment when they will be able to return, together with the husbands, to their people.

We look at photographs of a recent wedding of such a mixed couple, and at the same time conduct an ethnographic interview. The event took place in a teepee newly erected for the young couple, but the ceremonies originate in a Mongolian yurt and are borrowed from Mongolian culture. The girl arrives on horseback, riding on white felt placed in front of the entrance, where the husband's mother welcomes her by sprinkling milk. The basic dish of the feast is mutton, and carefully measured out portions are served according to a ceremonial code describing how each guest is to be treated. The symbolic test of the young wife involves making "the bride's tea": to light a fire, grind the tea, add the milk, butter, and salt, and serve it to all the guests. At the culmination of the ceremony she receives a piece of rope guaranteeing the good fortune of the household and symbolising the "reins of the yurt", here artificially attached to the teepee. In this manner, step-by-step, the Tsaatans gradually not only start speaking Mongolian but also assume the Mongolian language of symbols.

This is the second great problem facing the Tsaatan people – the preservation of linguistic distinctness and ethnic identity. Deprived of contact with Tuva they slowly begin using Mongolian, the language of schools and official communication, even within the family. They have no elite, authorities or leaders concerned with the retention of the remnants of tradition and self-identification. The awareness of ethnic distinction is declining. The Tsaatans know that they are Tuva but the genuine Tuva people live abroad; this is why they call themselves "the people of the taiga" and without using ethnic names distinguish themselves from the "people of the river", the *gohynkhyn* dwelling in the Valley.

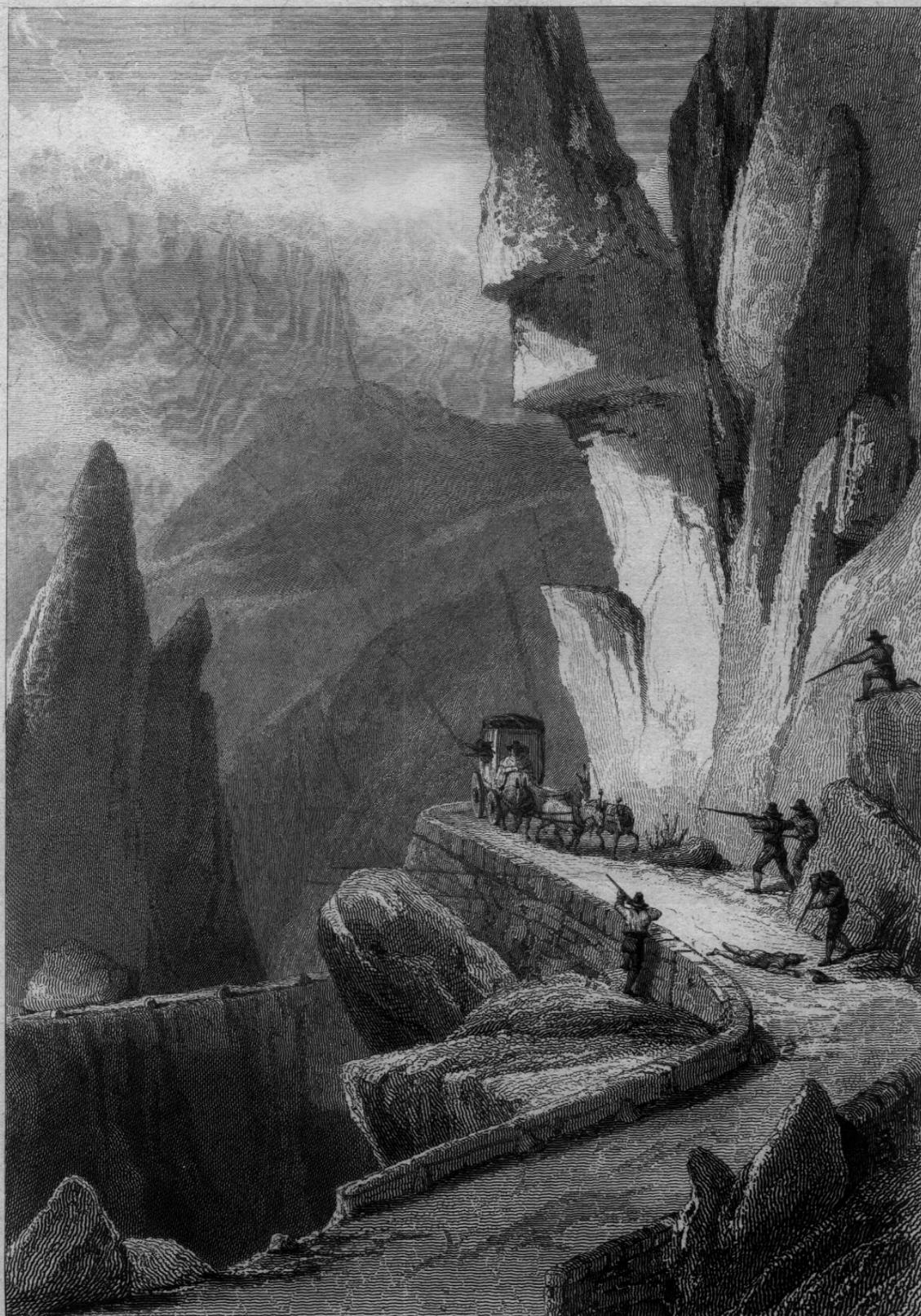
Ties with relatives in Tuva have been severed. For decades there have been no local contacts and the frontier remains firmly closed. The exchange of reindeer has ceased and the influx of new blood has come to a halt, affecting both people and animals. The unpopulated mountainous borderland is a dangerous terrain. Expeditions of robbers from beyond the border take place - desperate shepherds, former kolkhoz workers, now left to their own devices, are forced to obtain horses and cattle in some way. A few years ago it was even rumored (those in the know referred to reports of the US State Department) that Tuva was involved in smuggling Russian weapons for the Moslem Uyghurs in Chinese Sinkiang.

Despite the fact that reindeer require mountain pastures and become ill in the valleys, where they also fall prey to wolves, local strategies of survival force the people of the taiga to descend. The impact of the presence of Western tourists arriving thanks to travel agencies from Ulan Bator is growing, and not everyone has the time to go all the way into the mountains. Sometimes a foreign charity organization delivers food supplies. The world is starting to appreciate the need for help, however humble, in order to enable this small ethnic group to continue adding the bright colours of their distinctness to the global palette. Not much is needed - some flour, so that they would not slaughter the reindeer, tarpaulin for the teepees, so that they would not seek shelter in yurts and wooden cottages in settlements, and veterinary assistance in recreating the herds.

Paradoxically, it could be the incomers – researchers, travellers, and tourists – who might provide the last chance for the people of the taiga to preserve their culture. Who else will convince the Tsaatan that it is worthwhile to maintain certain elements of their lifestyle – the teepees, the reindeer, and the shamans and their art? And who will inform the West that if it is our caprice to observe a people traversing a path of culture so arduous and different from ours then we should all support them.

Endnotes

¹ J. S. Wasilewski, *Podróże do piekieł. Rzecz o szamańskich misteryach*, Warszawa 1979, p. 5.

J. Taylor del^t

A Paris chez Gide fils. — London R. Jennings.

E. Goodall sculp^t

SIERRA MORENA.

SIERRA MORENA.

Fig. 1. Although this illustration does not come from *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* by Jan Potocki I would like to add the opening words of the novel: *The first day Count d'Olavidez had not yet established foreign settlements in the Sierra Morena—that lofty chain of mountains that separates Andalusia from La Mancha – which was at that time inhabited solely by smugglers, bandits and a few gypsies. (...) The traveler who ventured into that wild region was assailed by a thousand terrors that would freeze the blood of the boldest man. (...) and invisible hands pushed him towards the edge of bottomless precipices.*

1.

The ethnographer who sets off on a tourist excursion into the mountains will from the professional point of view find himself almost in a desert. There is little material culture and a restricted domain for observing culturally consolidated behaviour. Consequently, the temptation of introspection grows – one may observe own experiences against the backdrop of the majesty, beauty, terror, etc. of the mountains, and then confront them with those recorded in culture, in which the mountains are a source of rapture and Romantic adulation. But how much can one experience? Ultimately, the predominating feature is the arduous labour of ascending and descending - hours, day, weeks on the same slopes, rubble, and scree, in a word - the ennui of the mountains.

The intellect, tirelessly transposing information, seeks in the course of those monotonous wanderings assorted themes for analysis, and wants to extract details and arrange them into entities. In order to supply it with material it is necessary to lower oneself to the level of observations of commonplace, petty, and haphazard behaviour that appears in the course of contact with the mountains at the time of mass-scale tourism.

Several years ago, I was in an Alpine hostel getting ready to spend several days on circumventing Massif des Écrins, encircled by the popular tourist footpath G. R. 54. While trekking along it is possible to carry out successively more ambitious excursions to the centrally located peaks (I was particularly attracted by the almost 4 000 metre La Meije, climbed by Wawrzyniec Żuławski, author of, i.a. *Wędrowki alpejskie* and *Tragedie tatrzańskie*, the unforgettable, skillfully didactic books of my childhood). When I asked the person running the hostel about the best way to set off along the circular trail, I heard: “Go together with all the others, because if you head in the opposite direction then *tout le mond* will say *bonjour* and you will be forced to reply to everyone”.

True, this is actually the horror of the most popular trails in the Alps - the unwritten obligation to constantly say or at least reply: *bonjour*, *buongiorno* or *salute*, *Gruetzi* or *Grüss Gott*. Naturally, the same holds true for both sides of the Tatra Mts.: *cześć*, *dzień dobry* (depending on the age of the tourist) or: *na zdar!* This is probably the case all over the world reached by tourism: greetings in Russian in the mountains of Central Asia, in Nepalese along the Himalayan trekking routes (the encountered monk or porter will accompany: *namaste* by clasping hands in front of his face), in Japanese in the region of Nagano, the so-called Japanese Alps, where persons admiring *koyo* (golden-red autumn) exchange three standard greetings, depending on the time of day: *o-hayo godzaimasu* in the early hours of the morning, *konnichi-wa* before noon, and *komban-wa* in the afternoon. In turn, *hagni haseio* can

JERZY S. WASILEWSKI

Who Says *Bonjour* to Whom on Mont Blanc?

Attempted Anthropology of Conventional Behaviour

be constantly heard in the national parks of Korea, where, similarly as in Japan, the ideally maintained and easy paths are full of excellently equipped tourists (the ladies only lack toques on their heads, an item *de rigueur* for their Japanese counterparts) who even carry walking sticks, totally superfluous and devoid of the function of providing support since these cheap items were purchased in a souvenir shop at the foot of the mountain.

The same situation prevails in the Western hemisphere. Along the trails of Yellowstone or the Grand Teton National Park we encounter immaculate female tourists in crisp shirts (sometimes even white - after all, the campsite below is outfitted with a laundry), whom one simply must greet with a smile and a *hello!* (the requirement to buy a new set of clothes before leaving on vacation in the States is stronger than anywhere else). Things are slightly different in Yosemite Valley full of half-naked climbers ascending El Capitan. They do not greet us, busy approaching the wall and outfitted with special equipment. But this is already quite a different, alienated world.

2.

Why do strangers experience the need to utter or at the very least murmur or growl a conventional greeting instead of passing each other on a mountain path without a single word, as they do in all other life situations? What is the meaning of such behaviour? Does it make any sense to ask about its significance? And, one would like to add, to whom are we supposed to pose this question? At least in the latter case the answer is implied. True, this is a scene of ritual avoidance and thus as if an opposite of the customary greeting, but it can be referred to assorted forms of symbolic behaviour.

Richard Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, act I, scene 5. Tristan on board ship is taking Isolde to her future husband, and his uncle, King Marke. Isolde prefers to die rather than marry Marke, and Tristan is ready to sacrifice his life together with her. The servant Brangäne,

however, changed the vials and instead of poison they drink a love potion. Tristan still tries to maintain his role of an envoy– suitor, and Isolde is angry with him for acting in this manner. Why do you avoid me? – she asks. *Sitte lehrt, wo ich gelebt: zur Brautfahrt der Brautwerber meide fern die Brau* - Tristan replies. *Aus welcher Sorg?* – Isolde wishes to know. *Fragt die Sitte!* – responds the young man, aware of the cultural imperative but not of its determinants.

Exactly, *look to manners!* – a directive as enigmatic as the words of a prophecy. The ethnographer, who knows that his interlocutor can explain a lot, will agree even though the response does not necessarily resolve that with which he, an outside observer, is most concerned and which he is capable of encompassing only in a general, naïve, and gauche question: why? He is aware of the fact that he must first ask his informer, but cannot stop at that stage since the latter will not, after all, confirm or verify associations appearing in the intellect of a well-read researcher who perceives astonishing analogies and is open to distant determinants. The interlocutor is unable to either reconstruct the historical origin of those cultural contents or discern all their profound meanings. He is capable of recalling folk etymology, devise secondary rationalisation, build the theory of the informer, and present his personal connection with a given praxis, but as a rule he will stop at some sort of: “This is the way our grandfathers and great grandfathers did it, and we do too” or simply: “This is our Mongolian custom”.

In order to understand more one must address the questions to the custom. But how? Let us try to put this recommendation into use. Generally speaking, it is necessary to situate the given issue in the most suitable context, to see it against the background of the whole changing cultural environment without going too far with abstract and arbitrary associations but also without merely registering openly declared meanings. Let us, therefore, start by putting intuitions into order.

3.

One can unperturbedly presuppose that the discussed custom that is, after all, a conventionalised and petrified form of collective behaviour and not an individual psychic reaction or an emotional surge, assumed form at a time when mountaineering was the occupation of a few and was accompanied by fears much more serious than is the case today since the risks and threats were also greater. People who rarely met others along a mountain trail let each other know that they could rely on them. If only one could hear those conversations resounding in the mountain air! In a naïve reconstruction of that, which took place in the Alps for, let us say, two and half centuries (and in the Tatra Mts. for not quite two centuries) one can

imagine that at the time of the pioneers such dialogues were composed of longer questions about the course of the trail, the conditions higher up, the lurking peril.

These contacts were preceded by a conventional greeting – naturally, differently uttered by the “gentlemen” and differently by the local guides or highlanders encountered near their huts. All those: *praise the Lord..., may God guide you ..., stay with God...*, and other wishes of good luck ... Did they become the source of some sort of tradition, non-formulated demands of *savoir vivre*? Who should be the first to say: “good day” - the person on his way up (as if the younger addressing the older) or perhaps the one enjoying more comfortable conditions, or - as is always the case – the more polite? After all, in the high mountains uncertainty gives rise to an intensified need for human solidarity as well as a readiness to provide it. A conversation expresses these hopes, even in a form reduced to a one-word greeting (but assuming bilaterality) that is not only a religious wish expressing hope that God will guarantee good fortune, but also carries a communiqué: we have found ourselves in a small group of daredevils entering a dangerous terrain and should help each other – just as you many count on me so I rely on you. The progressing process of taming the mountains obviously resulted in rendering impressions banal and a conventionalisation of the communiqué, thus granting the greetings a stereotype quality.

Walking along well-trodden trails we should not make light of the elements of horror, the unknown, and the unpredictable in the perception of the first explorers. After all, “wilderness” was in their Cartesian minds a sphere of the unaccountable.¹ When on 18 June 1741 the Englishman William Windham accompanied by eight fellow-countrymen and five locals travelling with horses set off from “Chamougni” to the Montenvers glacier (today we take a funicular to Mer de Glace; on the margin, at present this is a banal journey while several decades ago it was regarded as an important event) all the Englishmen carried pistols. An account of this excursion – not a single shot was fired - containing advice and warnings is probably the first modern Alpine tourist guidebook.² English gentlemen were for long the pioneers of Alpine expeditions – first tourist, then mountain climbing, but also intellectual, a source of conceptual language to describe the high mountain landscape up to then never seen so closely. One of the most popular concepts was Burke’s aesthetic category of the sublime, overwhelming might, whose immeasurable enormity startles the tiny human figure. Mountains became the image of metaphysical or eschatological scenery: they forced to perceive the first step towards the throne of Supreme Majesty, a vestibule of lands that could be experienced only by spirits freed of the body, as in American metaphysical paintings, e.g. the works of Frederick Church. The

description coined by John Ruskin: *Mountains are the great cathedrals of the earth*, recurs also in Polish litanies of lofty expressions: *the Tatras – the church of the worlds* (J. N. Kamiński), *the Tatra temple* (Zaruski), or *the altars of freedom and testimony of the greatness of God, the nothingness of Creation* (Rautenstrauchowa).

We search in vain for descriptions of greetings in portrayals of the Tatra Mts. inspired by the Romantic spirit. After all, people went to the mountains to challenge the Eternal and expected to see views dating from a period inaccessible for the human gaze: *Some sort of chaos stretched all around us. A highlander from Bukowina said that this is the way things looked prior to creation, but it seemed to me that this is the way they would appear after the end of the world.*

One was expected to behave as if under the impact of a personal encounter with the Creator – or at least to describe one's impressions by resorting to a comparison to such a meeting: *I ran out, looked, and dropped to my knees, covering my face with both hands, as if I had seen a reflection of God or at least His throne* (both fragments from a description of an excursion of Łucja Rautenstrauchowa to Morskie Oko Lake in 1839).

Those informing about their "solemn impressions" described experiences suggesting that they had set off into the mountains alone, without meeting another person. There simply is no place for anyone else in such a landscape. *The Tatra Mts. are a rocky desert – wild and dangerous*, Zaruski wrote in as late as 1912, evidently oblivious of hundreds of summer visitors and resort patients on the already well-marked trails outfitted with chains. Even if from such accounts we do find out how people reacted to the mountains (or rather learn about the convention in which they described them) we are still totally ignorant about their reaction to others, inevitably encountered on route, unless they admitted to censoring descriptions of such meetings. *I do not repeat their [shepherds'] conversation since it left an indescribably unpleasant impression. I believed that foulness and misdemeanours would not cross the immense granite blocks built by the hand of God, but the exchange between those highlanders came as a horrendous disappointment! ... Are you, my town dwellers, incapable of restraining yourselves for even single minute so as not to spread our decadence onto this poor and ignorant people and of respecting its innocent simplicity?* – cried out Lucjan Lipiński, a notary from Lwów, who bravely permitted several shepherds to transport him across Morskie Oko Lake (1860).

Such a temple cannot contain any sort of impurity, and such a church has no place for dissenters. Encountering them we should keep silent or burst out in anger. I take the liberty of recalling at least one enraged text although today we find it embarrassing; considering that much worse sins are being revealed there is no need to despair that these are the reflections of the

great Stanisław Witkiewicz recorded in his account of the Tatra Mts., recognised as the most outstanding of its sort in Polish writings.

Before we find out what he had to say, recall that Witkiewicz, who in an introduction to his book was critical of the highlanders and their mythologisation by people from the lowlands (*cepry*), changed his style once he entered a path leading to the mountains. The highlanders now became the protagonists of an epic poem (with Sabała as Homer) as if their villages were located directly near Mt. Kościelec or Mt. Rysy; in this pristine surrounding the author was even more distressed by the presence of an ethnically alien intruder:

All melts in the air and glimmering light, becoming immaculately clean as if it were pure crystal ... Eyes gaze upon this harmony of translucent hues.

A barren desert empty of people, full of ruins of the world, enveloped in soft, purple mist loses its terror and wildness and stretches beneath our feet in the manner of a calm and tranquil sea ...

Suddenly, against the blue and opal backdrop, there appears a comical figure wearing a sheepskin jerkin over a long coat and drooping trousers. He takes off his hat, bows, smiles with a trace of humility, fear, and desire to ingratiate himself, marches in front of our group fawning constantly and vanishes like a phantom, leaving behind a trace of a whiff so familiar in the lowlands. How did the Jew find his way here? With whom did he come and whom did he follow? No one knows.

A trivial, fantastic phantom, which in a single moment populated Mt. Zawrat with crowds of men named Mishures, tradesmen, small town troublemakers, dirt, stench, the Jewish question...

Foul "shadows" gathered soaring across the pure air and invaded our imagination.

This polite Jew arrived like the "shadow of the foe", who appears in Wallenrod "to mix blood in the chalices of merriment".

Finally, we begin our descent down Mt. Zawrat (...).³

The image of the anonymous Jew, a mixture of a trickster and a *mishigene*, outlined by Witkiewicz could become part of the collections of the National Gallery of the Excluded.

4.

Returning to meetings and greetings exchanged in the mountains, try not to laugh at the "supposed" horror and "untrue" emptiness of rocky trails. The adventure experienced by Hans Castorp in a snowstorm indicates how easy it is to succumb to the temptations of being all alone in the magic mountains, for which one may have to pay the price of, at the very least, a vision of one's death or descent into madness not even half an hour from Sonnenhof Hotel. Each encounter of another person dispels terror and restores normalcy.



Fig. 2. Course of ascent onto Mont Blanc from ChamoniX and Les Houches

Change the context in which we usually examine the titular custom, and from which we expect an answer to the question: “why?”. After all, danger is not the sole context in which there emerges a community expressed by a greeting. The same conventional words can be heard along safe, lowland routes.

Let us descend from the mountains into a nature reservation such as Chincontague Bay along the Atlantic coast of the USA. An idyllic landscape and a paradise not only for ornithologists - nearby there is a secluded beach for nudists, where in a state of undress and resembling Biblical Adam we may return to heavenly conditions. Mature ladies passing by along woodland paths merrily chirp: *hello!* (unless we beat them to it), and although the greeting could be perceived as an American variant of sociotechnical prevention of an unpleasant incident, in this wilderness its basic meanings and contexts differ.

In such bucolic conditions, similarly as on arduous mountain trails, we feel an obligation to demonstrate our better, open, and unselfish side. Why?

More than a decade ago, when paradigms of symbolic anthropology were enthusiastically constructed, I proposed a holistic answer: we act in this way to preserve a place in a certain system. Key importance for comprehending human symbolic behaviour belongs to the fact that, as a rule, it refers to images of an ideal state, either totally impossible to attain (being mythical and straight out of paradise) or non-existent on a daily basis (and difficult to realise); nonetheless, it remains postulated and symbolically recreated, especially in situations of ritual beginnings and festivities. This ideal state has different albeit overlapping levels, and is expressed in several mutually exchangeable and supplementary codes. It possesses a strictly mythological dimension (images of a golden age, which existed and/or will occur), a personal dimension, in which human condition is improved on an individual scale (*via* an idealisation of childhood, specially the embryonic state envisaged as a carefree period in contrast to adulthood), and, finally, a social dimension; in the latter, the ideal condition is attained by attempts at a ritual realisation of *communitas* – a society of equality, based not on domination and the games of roles played according to a rigorous order, but on a community-focused unhampered coexistence of personalities.⁴

The space of Nature, contrasted with the contamination of Culture or the degeneration of Civilisation, is also treated as an ideal domain both in archaic systems, despite the entire ambivalence of “the wild”, and in contemporary mythologies. The ritual realisation of an ideal can take place only in a “pure” and “unsullied” domain.

Nature enclosed in reserves, protected against exploitation and pollution, deprived of its horror by granting it the status of a “national park” (after all, a



Fig. 3. Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Na przełęczy*

park cannot be hostile – it is not a menacing forest), is an ideal environment for implementing the contemporary festivity: Sunday-weekend, school holidays, and vacations, and, at the same time, for improving its social condition. Some sort of an automatism or special cultural coercion is at work here: having found ourselves in natural space (at the time of festivities) we return to our natural/ideal condition: when the obligation to work, social oppression, and dependence come to a halt, inter-personal distances decrease and the feeling of a community comes into being. Greetings and smiles all around.

5.

Such reflections as the ones presented above lead to two equally justified albeit basically rather distant targets. The custom of greetings could be perceived both as a reaction to a threat and as a demonstration of a merry, ideal community. Can these conclusions, reached by means of speculations, be put to the test in ethnographic observation, which would confirm one of the hypotheses and, at the same time, endow the findings with more real features? Nothing stands in our way. Let us then set off for Mont Blanc and see where people will say: *bonjour* (non-French speaking tourists, as a rule, say: *hello!*).

From Chamonix we travel several kilometres to Les Ouches, and from here ascend a steep forest path with

the Arandellys ravines to the left. The trail is narrow and shady, with almost no one going down; once or twice we are compelled to say something while passing someone – all other forms of behaviour would be so unacceptable as to become unnatural. We spend the night in the woods, but in the morning, after a brief walk, we finally see the peaks. The path reaches the tracks of the funicular, which several hundred meters further, at the last stop (at an altitude of only 2 327 metres), brings a crowd of those for whom this is the maximum attainable proximity to the White Mountain. It is also exactly here, some twenty meters from the funicular that the *bonjours* start. Parents and teenagers, attractive ladies - hence the necessity for greetings and suitable facial expressions.

Soon the trail grows empty, the arid slopes of Rognes appear, ending with an empty stone *Baraque Forestière* – it is not quite clear whence the *forestière* in view of the fact that the forest ends much lower down. Since someone is planning to spend the night here we are compelled to talk a little and then go on, towards the Tête Rousse hut below the summit. In the morning, departure takes place in darkness; across the snow-covered glacier (where someone is still sleeping in pitched tents) we head for the celebrated Grand Couloir, which has to be traversed.

Writing these words, with the route already behind me, I am still unable to objectively describe the degree

of its danger. A competent author declared: *It is estimated that some 7 000 people perished on Mont Blanc alone (...). A large number were the victims of the infamous traverse of the great Aiguille du Goûter couloir on the Gouter-Bossse, exposed to rock avalanches despite the metal cables installed here [untrue: there are no cables – J. S. W.]. Guides called this traverse a “Russian roulette”, with rocks difficult to avoid, falling often and quite unexpectedly.*⁵

This is why we are here at dawn, when the rocks are still frozen and the risk of being bombarded is lesser. On the other hand, the shelf along which the path runs is much more dangerous now than during the day – iced over and slippery it creates the threat of falling; this is the first time that an ice axe and crampons are useful as indispensable extensions of our cautiously moving limbs.

No one has arrived yet, so that the problem of greetings simply does not exist, but then everyone is much too concentrated on his movements to notice others. Not until we reached the other side of the couloir, vertical but secured with chains, could we relax and feel just as if we were on Orla Percé (Eagle’s Path) in the Tatra Mts. On the summit, or rather on a stone edge, stands Refuge de l’Aiguille du Goûter bustling with pre-noon activity. Busy, we do not expect to be greeted, but when after a meal we once again set off across the glacier we pass upon several occasions people returning from a stroll and exchange brief, one-word greetings and smiles.

A further route leads across a gentle snowy slope. We are forced to spend the night in the last possible shelter before the summit, the Vallota refuge (4 347 metres). This aluminium tin can, with an Arctic construction, is the target of a hurricane, which a narrow entrance prevents from invading the interior. Inside, some Germans who arrived earlier take photographs of probably the messiest dwelling in Europe: piles of cans, paper, and old and dirty mattresses. Many stay here, but no one cleans up the rubbish – a good chance to have a laugh at the slovenly French. At dawn, still in the dark, we begin the last stage of the climb. The ascent along the summit *arête* is the most beautiful episode of the expedition. Groups of mountaineers, each composed of several persons sharing a rope, are seen from afar as rows of ghosts. Only the lights of the headlamps - firebugs - slowly move upwards. Everyone walks carefully along an edge that would have been as steep as a roof ridge had it not been for a thick layer of snow, in which we create a safe path.

At the top it is already quite bright. A brief moment of triumph, some cries of joy, photographs are taken, but everyone wants to look at the panorama of the peaks and savour success on his own. In addition, the wind is tearing our heads off and at this altitude we are already suffering from a mild headache.

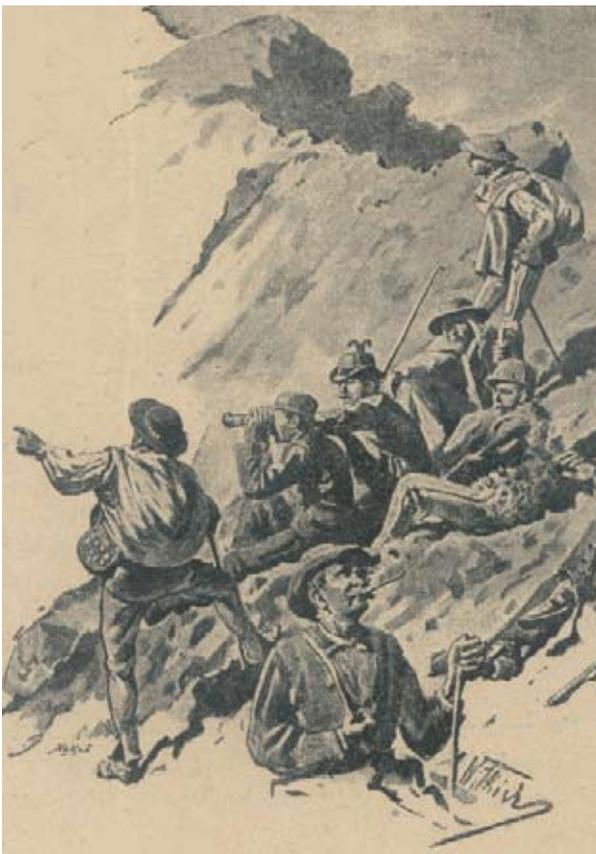


Fig. 3. Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Na przełęczy*

In other words - and in response to the titular question - no one says *bonjour* on Mont Blanc. The same holds true for the hurried descent, when everyone wants to quickly find himself at the bottom since the worst that can happen is the weather changing for the worse on the icy fields with no orientation points and, in addition, crisscrossed by fissures. Once again, the Vallota refuge, with some taking photographs to the accompaniment of conventional half-smiles. The same occurs prior to the arrival at the refuge, where we can finally afford to relax while eating.

Then, on the steep way down no one feels like speaking to the inexperienced and panic-stricken young American women who attach themselves with a short harness to every piece of metal along this laughingly easy trail, because there is only one thought in our minds: what will the traverse of the couloir be like? It is afternoon and rocks could be falling frequently. Will a helmet or a clever evading movement of the body offer protection?

An answer - decisively negative - comes immediately when, after having arrived at the exit of the path, I take a look from behind the couloir at the vertical slope to see a veritable torpedo dashing down - an enormous block falling in leaps and bounds and every few metres bouncing off the wall. One may only hope that now all will be calm for the next few seconds required to rapidly traverse the path, which at this time of the day is unfrozen and well-trodden. No chance to speak to anyone either before or after. At the other end - a moment of relaxation since no more danger looms ahead. Quite a few people probably experience those seconds as a desperate leap by a condemned man - if one succeeds then one has to rush on without looking back. At least this is what comes to mind when gazing at the considerable number of brand-name ice-picks left behind - obviously simply forgotten - at the spot where everyone takes off and puts away the no longer required equipment. I too flee without speaking to anyone.

6.

Despite all the obvious faults of the above account and the conventional nature of the accepted "research procedure" we could hazard some sort of tentative conclusions. Once we find ourselves at a more empirical level of studies, closer to reality, we notice that human behaviour and activity (each realisation of a given custom and its practise) are determined by totally different reasons than it seemed when seen from a more distant, idealising, and speculative perspective. One would like to add that at that precise moment psychology triumphs over ethnology.

It is quite feasible that those concrete determinants do not annul general ones; it must be honestly recorded that mountain greetings do not take place at

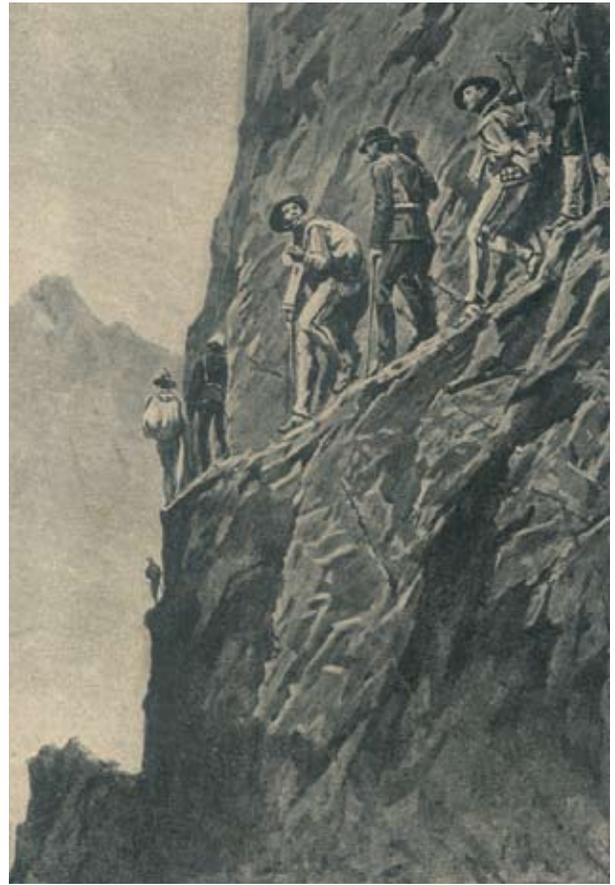


Fig. 3. Stanisław Witkiewicz, *Na przełęczy*

moments of danger or while admiring Nature (in both situations a person concentrates on himself), but upon the occasion of fleeting meetings. They are not the outcome of profound experiences, but a way of reacting to contingency in a situation generating dilemmas and calling for arbitrary decisions.

Inconvenience consists of the fact that in the conditions of surrounding emptiness even a fleeting encounter with another person assumes the features of a meeting. For a single moment a stranger becomes physically close and outright the sole encountered person, a fact that has to be noted by greeting him and entering into a relation. Actually, this differs little from situations with which every day abounds: in an elevator, in a corridor, at a table. The emergent social micro-relation could be either silently ignored or conventionally accentuated with some sort of a laconic communiqué: *thank you, pardon me, bon appetite, oops*, etc. Universally accepted standards of personal culture end this dilemma by following some sort of psychic economy: it makes more sense to smile at a person sharing a lift than to peer at the tips of one's shoes. Personal culture tells us to accentuate the social dimension of such a situation even though comfortable egocentrism would prefer to ignore it.

The process of greeting is connected with the reception of a given situation as social, even in the cat-

egories of some sort of obligation. This is why parents with children, concerned with the latter's suitable upbringing, will always say: *bonjour*, as will good-looking women and aspiring beginners, attaching importance to appropriate forms of behaviour more than old hands are wont to do.

The gesture of greeting is also connected with recognising a given situation as an inter-personal relation and not as a fragment of an impersonal crowd. I would be inclined to explain the existence of this perceptive differentiation by the fact that it is not customary to greet and thank, e.g. a person sharing a ski lift chair (this habit is totally absent in overcrowded Alpine conditions and is rapidly vanishing also in Poland). On the other hand, persons skiing in the woodlands of Warsaw suburbs greet each other. Naturally, this is not the case of sharing all-human values in empty high mountains but a temporary experiencing of kinship with scarce aficionados and perhaps something more than conventional *savoir vivre*.

7.

Or is it possible that conventional, desultory behaviour – I treat this expression already as a technical term both obvious and understandable, although as far as I know no one has as yet used it in anthropology – conceals some sort of a more profound mystery? Could it be that it contains something recorded in an ancient illegible script understood only by an ethnologist?

The American folklore expert Alan Dundes tells us on the margin of his study on beliefs about liquids and moisture as the essence of life to pay attention to expressions and greetings used in the course of a group meal, functioning up to this day in assorted European traditions.⁶ Let us, therefore, ask why sitting down to a table or seeing people eating we say: *enjoy your meal*, *bon appetit*, *buen provecho*, *Guten Appetit*, *smacznego*, *priyatnogo apetita*, etc.

At the onset of the contention we should recall the conception formulated by George Foster (who inspired Dundes) and concerning the existence in the traditional mentality of assorted European cultures of the following "folk idea": the conviction that the world has a limited number of goods, and hence the fear that each object that feeds, grows, and develops does so at the inevitable cost of another adjoining object, depriving it of strength. Hence the belief in the failure of two men sowing simultaneously, the evil impact of an embryo upon the child held by an expectant woman, the joint initiation of consumption. It is upon the basis of this principle, claim Foster and Dudes, that in traditional beliefs a shared meal must pose the threat of an unequal benefitting from limited goods. (The reader who finds such theses unconvincing is requested to recall Frazer's material in *The Golden Bough* about magic threats in the course of joint meals and the ways of

their avoidance). One method involves a verbal declaration of good will – a wish expressed aloud that the people sharing our meal would benefit from it, even more obligatory when one does not eat and thus acts as a potentially envious witness, e.g. walking past the table.

This sort of a witness, Foster noticed, is predominantly the person serving the meal, i.e. in restaurants it is the waiter who creates the threat and whom the diners deprive of the magic power to grow. Some sort of compensation is required. What should it be? A tip! Not by accident does this word in various languages refer to the fact that the waiter could buy himself something to drink for the received money. Characteristically, the beverages vary and the expressions refer to their general character: *Trinkgeld*, *propine*, *gorgeta*, *napoynitsa*, low alcohol content: *pourboire*, or non-alcoholic properties: *na chaj*, *chayeviyeye* (*dien'gi*). The proposal pertains to beverages since it is precisely liquids that (as Fundes showed in a separate argument) constitute the element of life.

8.

Admittedly, we no longer live in times to which such *folk ideas* are applicable. What is, therefore, the most contemporary and, desired or not, super-modern and postmodern context of the Alpine greeting custom? After all, its backdrop and scenery were not only the Alps bereft of people but also social Alps, civilised and outright cultured. At this point it is impossible to even outline the history of this process, but let us at least put certain obvious findings into order.

The natural landscape of the Alps has been for centuries subjected to a transformation into its cultural counterpart. If one were to write a history of human work and material means applied for this transfiguration of the mountains then we could accept as its symbolic onset the famous wine vinegar applied by Hannibal to crush rocks on his way to Italy. In later epochs use would have been made of picks and various other tools belonging to miners, alchemists, and treasure hunters.⁷

I would happily read an *opus magnum* containing an anthropological summary of subsequent periods: the process of rendering mountains accessible *via* a network of roads with impressive tunnels, gigantic hydro-technical ventures, the creation of a colossal skiing and tourist infrastructure, anti-avalanche protection devices, etc.

Who should be appointed the symbolic patron of those undertakings? Forget Hannibal and his elephants, for whom the Alps were only an obstacle and not an objective, although we should add to his credit that he chose beautiful Chamonix for his passage way. Actually, this is probably only a legend: today, it is ac-

cepted that Hannibal and his animals crossed Alpes Cottiennes, probably by way of the Petit Mont Cenis Pass; all told, there are about thirty similar hypotheses.

Perhaps we should go back to the Bronze Age – making use of a discovery made 12 years ago on a pass above the Ötztal Valley along the Austrian-Italian frontier – and give pride of place to that perfectly preserved man who for reasons totally unknown ventured onto eternal snow at an altitude of 3 200 metres? This astonishing episode probably has a logical explanation: since Ötzi was killed there (he was wounded in the back) then he probably died as a victim of assault – perhaps during an attempted robbery of grazing sheep.

Sheep farming, poverty, and a sparse population – the history of human penetration of the Alps symbolically starts with these motives that will remain its symbols until the contemporary invasion of mass-scale tourism. Reinhold Messner, born in a poor Tyrolean village, repeats *ad nauseam* in his most recent book containing reflections produced by meetings with highlanders on all continents, that his childhood took place in conditions not very different from the life of the Sherpas and the Dardic and Kalash peoples – hence his excellent communication with them. Everywhere in the mountains he saw the same paradoxical phenomenon: progressing tourist exploration accompanied by demographic and ecological regress, i.e. the lowering of the limit of permanent settlements, the abandoning of arduous and risky sheep raising, the depopulation of villages caused by seeking employment in the all-absorbing tourist industry⁸.

We are probably unaware of the multiple changes that are the outcome of the last half a century. In 1949 the village of Saas Fee, today: a resort near Zermatt and the destination of a mass-scale influx of visitors, was connected with the rest of the world only by a narrow mule trail and its wooden houses seen in pre-war photographs resemble Nepal or the Balkans. On the other hand, we also have to remember what could be paradoxically encountered in those houses. Professor Dynowski told me how already before the war he once entered such a cottage (*you wouldn't give three groszy for it, sonny*) from which one could hear a steady rattle: inside, a bearded highlander using a foot-propelled lathe made cogwheels for watches probably commissioned by some less renowned firm. An historian of mentality should be asked about the significance for the onset of Swiss watchmaking of Protestant thoroughness and respect for time among the highlanders from the region of Geneva; an ethnographer will add that another consequence of such attitudes was lacemaking or the production of music boxes – ideal occupations for long winter months.

Someone might claim that these are mere anecdotes and individual examples. But a tourist for whom particular observations could create an identical pattern: modern accessories with an archaic foundation, might say something quite different. After all, even at the height of 3 200 meters above sea level he still encounters the same sheep as those from the era of *homo tyrolensis*, the only difference being that their ears have plastic triangles with a barcode. The sheep are probably managed by great companies, such as Danone or Bridel, and soon there will come a day when a geostationary satellite will read those codes and use a computer to steer the movement of the flocks. The spiritual culmination of the cultural conquest of the natural environment involves placing in the mountains material props of the cult. Here closes the largest circle in history – from the 20 000 years-old enigmatic signs in

Val Camonica and many other places in the Alps, shrines on the spot of old pre-Christian cults, and crosses towering over valleys to contemporary art on the peaks. Spiritual experiences in the mountains were always assisted by religious sets – today, they assume increasingly often an extra-confession and abstract form. Along the route to Roterthorn near Zermatt there appeared recently a set of five quasi-shrines – contemplation objects. Metal stands support colourful glass sheets with brief inspirational texts, enigmatic but arranged in a legible order: the first, at the foot of the summit, is about geological beginnings, the next are about Nature and living creatures, and the one at the very top is the loftiest and most general. An example of complete universality, and in four languages to boot: French, German, English, and Japanese.

A stay in the mountains obviously intensifies the need for mysticism. This can be seen in particular in resorts in the Italian Alps, where bookshops are full of titles about local mysterious rituals (masqueraders, demonology, the Carnival), but also the mysticism of Tibet and hermetic mythologies of the mountains spanning from the esoteric-Himalayan interests of the founders of the SS to works about mystical lands: Shambhala, Shangri-La and Agartha. It is there, in the book stores, that one should examine present-day spirituality and then construct a new definition of culture to replace the old proposals made by Taylor or Malinowski: culture is a system of measures used for the production and, predominantly, sale and distribution of goods.

The times of kitschy statues of the saints, such as the monstrous gold Madonna on the much-frequented Monte Moro Pass above Macugnaga, have come to an end. Now it is not the popularity of a site that qualifies it for installing a statue but its inaccessibility. In the rocks of Congo Star, a difficult peak soaring above Mer de Glace, there stands on the edge of a

chasm a large figure made of rust-free steel glistening in the sunshine; its hand hurls into the air an object resembling an airplane or a bird. It was placed in a spot inaccessible and even invisible to all but the most experienced climbers (a TD+ trail).

What theoretician of postmodernism should we ask for an apt characteristic of phenomena that comprise the new aestheticization of the Alps? I hazard the observation that even an advertisement placed in Alpine scenery (billboards, posters showing luxury jewellery, watches, and sweets) causes some sort of consequences reverse from the ones anticipated up to now. It is not the mountains that are adding attraction to the consumer goods advertised against their backdrop – it is the attractiveness of those gods that is transferred onto the peaks in whose scenery they are demonstrated (advertised in funicular stations, displayed in shops with the best location, or with views of the mountains in the background).

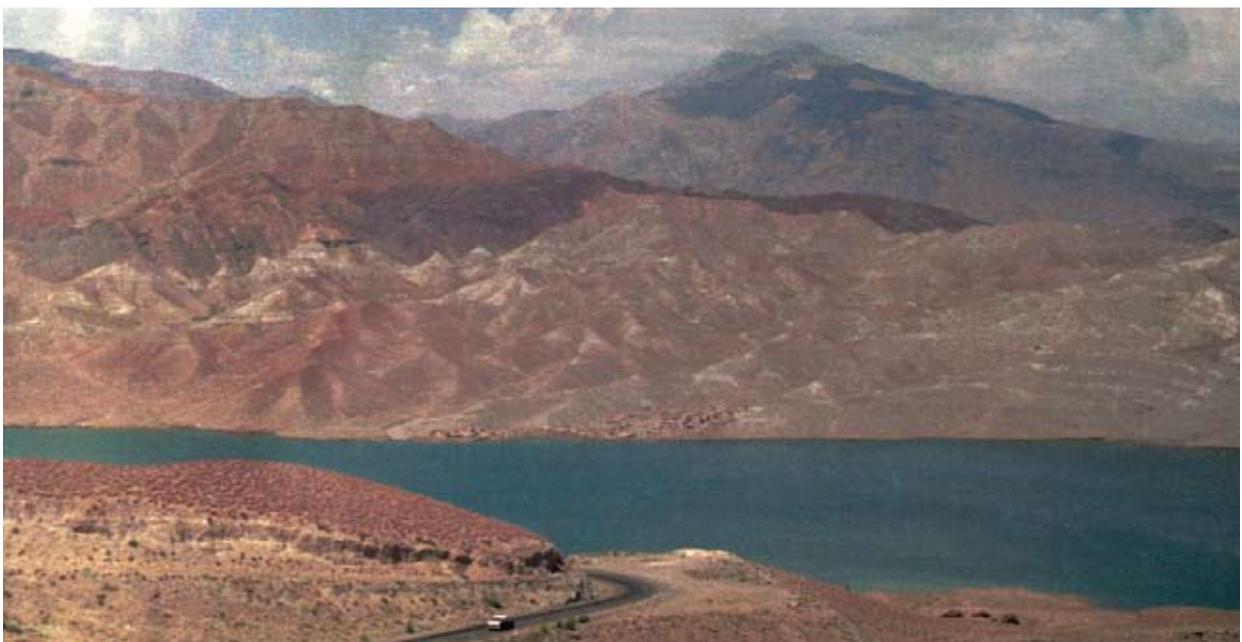
Chocolate with the regular-shaped pyramid of the Matterhorn on the wrapping adds a certain nobility to an, after all, extremely rocky and avalanche-prone mountain, which thanks to the product becomes easier to tame. Omnipresent depictions of Swiss watches, all set at the smiling hour of 10.09 a.m., magnified on advertisement posters and thus greatly evocative, endow the mountains with additional gracefulness, especially if the makers are Breguet, Blancpain or Vacheron-Constantin (to mention only those among the most exclusive brands established in the eighteenth century; after all, Onegin wore a Breguet, albeit still made in Paris, before the firm moved to Vallée de Joux in the Swiss Jura). Associated images of punctuality, infallibility, and sophistication are transferred to the surrounding landscape, encircling it - just like K-2 with

metal cables in the famous photograph illustrating the ecologists' slogan: "Free the mountains" - with a net of associations domesticating it and robbing it of its wild and unpredictable features. Only a person with the character of Diogenes would not succumb to the pressure of those icons of elegance and refuse to notice that they elevate the status of the traveller, add finesse to his sojourn, and render the Alps more dignified.

The mountains are becoming increasingly elegant and they expect the same of all those who have found themselves in their midst. They make us pay for our stay not only with a plastic card but also with the conventional coin of good upbringing.

Endnotes

- ¹ M. Oelschlager, *The Idea of Wilderness*, New Haven 1995.
- ² W. Windham, *An Account of the Glaciers or Ice Alps of Savoy*, London 1744.
- ³ S. Witkiewicz, *Na przełęczy*, Warszawa 1891, p. 147.
- ⁴ J. S. Wasilewski, *Tabu a paradygmaty etnologii*, Warszawa 1989.
- ⁵ G. Hattingh, *Najpiękniejsze drogi wspinaczkowe świata*, Katowice 2000, p. 82.
- ⁶ A. Dundes, *Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye. An Essay in Indo-European and Semitic Worldview*, in: *Interpreting Folklore*, Bloomington 1980, pp. 102-105.
- ⁷ It is worth recalling the charming publication by Jacek Kolbuszewski: *Skarby króla Gregoriusa*, Katowice 1971 and a collection of studies by Józef Szaflarski: *Poznanie Tatr*, Warszawa 1972. An unequalled erudite work about the perception of the mountains is still: *Góry niewzruszone. O różnych wyobrażeniach przyrody w dziejach nowożytnej kultury europejskiej* by Jacek Woźniakowski (Warszawa 1974).
- ⁸ R. Messner, *Bergvoelker. Bilder und Begegnungen*, Munchen 2001.



Afganistan. An route to Jalababach. Photo Anna Beata Bohdziewicz

The Homelessness of Odysseus

In the word: "home" (Polish: *dom*), belonging to the joint ancient Indo-European cultural substrate (hence the Greek: *domos* and *dōma*, the Latin: *domus*, the Sanskrit: *dam*, etc.), linguists discover source meanings associated with predominantly two activities – the technical "building" and the social or existential "dwelling". As Beata Spieralska wrote in "Konteksty": *The "home" appears as distinguished space constructed by man, in which he is "at home", and which guarantees a feeling of security for him and his family.*¹ Naturally, however, one can be "at home" (Latin adverb: *domi* or *domum*) only when this existential situation is contrasted with the dangerous alienness of that, which is "outside" (Latin: *locativus – foris*, behind the door), or in the "Cracovian" variant: *na polu* (in the field, *peregre* – outside the house or town, composed of: *per* and *ager* – field). I would be inclined to say, therefore, that "home" (*dom*), comprehended as a cultural category, is a linguistic tool that produces this dichotomous conceptual structure. Is the thus established relation between "home" and that, which the latter is not (*domi/foris*), to possess the form of a simple opposition comprising a lucid, symmetric, and polarised configuration? Or is the application of a more subtle delimitation required here?

Since at the conference we speak about the home as a "path of existence" and thus stress its dynamic aspect I propose to reflect, even if only briefly, on a text absolutely paradigmatic for this theme, namely, Homer's *The Odyssey*. I shall try to demonstrate (concisely, and thus intentionally resigning from, for example, evoking copious literature on the subject as well as the whole subsequent Ulysses tradition, which developed in European literature and art from Euripides to Wyspiański or Joyce) that in this narration it is possible to come across traces of paradoxical topography or, to use a term coined by Derrida, *la cartographie impossible* that renders the relation between "home" and "the distant" an interesting problem. I am not concerned merely with the fact that Odysseus reached magical lands and floating islands by navigating along courses that cannot be easily delineated on an ordinary map and that can be always contrasted with the familiar and spatially stable Ithaca. What I find the most interesting in this story is a component that renders problematic this durable and solid beginning and end of the journey, its *arche* and *telos*.

First, however, briefly about that, which appears to be obvious in Homer's *The Odyssey* – it is without doubt a treatise about the home. This is not, however, a home in which one resides but one for which one longs and to which one returns. In it we are dealing with a structure whose dynamic recalls an archer's bow: distance resembles the taut bowstring, while residing prior to the journey and after its end denotes stability and solace. This is why it can be said about

Odysseus: His most genuine past is his origin, His fundamental emotion is nostalgia, adventure is magnificent, and risk is desired as the salt of life but only when there exists a return.² He is undoubtedly an archetype voyager but, at the same time, a person succumbing to the nostalgic force of home gravity; as *homo viator* or *peregrinator* Odysseus remains within the range of a stabilising force that comprises the source of his subjective identity.

According to this interpretation, therefore, the home "enroots" man although, let us note, this expression denotes as if a technical assumption of the plant metaphor. This seems to be said quite literally by the key moment in *The Odyssey*, namely, the "great sign" that confirms Odysseus' identity in the eyes of Penelope. Recall the scene: Odysseus returns home, but since twenty years had passed his faithfully waiting wife wishes to be sure that it is really he - subjecting him to a trial she asks to remove the marital bed from their bedroom. In response, Odysseus tells a story known only to the couple: *A great secret [mega sema, great sign] went into its making, and it was my work and mine alone. A long-leaved olive tree, strong and vigorous, and thick as a pillar, grew in the courtyard. I built my room of solid stone around it, finished it off with a fine roof, and added tight-fitting timber doors. I trimmed the trunk from the roots up, after cutting off all the long-leaved olive branches, smoothed it off skillfully and well, and trued it to the line: that was my bedpost. I drilled holes with the auger, and with this for its beginning fitted all the smooth timbers of my bed until it was complete. I inlaid it with ivory, silver and gold, and stretched shining purple straps of ox-hide across. That was its secret [sema]... (XXIII, 188-202).*

The scene could be interpreted in numerous ways. Its contents resemble a fairy-tale puzzle, whose solution is decisive for the further fate or life of the protagonist (as is known, Odysseus is adept at solving all sorts of puzzles), or the literary trace of a ritual that by "rendering topical" this foundation event ultimately completes and sanctions Odysseus' "return" (*nostos*) – not only to Ithaca, comprehended spatially

as the designation of the journey, but also to the logical “beginning” of his (home) existence, his *arche*. *The olive tree proof* – wrote Stanisław Rosiek, referring to Jean Starobinski – *enabled Odysseus to combine the beginning and end of journey and existence. By repeating in the story a deed that once made it possible to create the marital bedroom he confirmed his t r u e i d e n t i t y*.³

In this interpretation, apparently, Odysseus becomes increasingly himself the closer he finds himself to Ithaca; his identity becomes the most stable, i.e. as if enrooted in the marital bed, that core of his home; it is here, in the embrace of Penelope, that he soothes the pain of excessive estrangement. If we recall that it is in this bed resembling a tree of life that Telemachus was conceived then the story told to Penelope will render Odysseus similar to that exemplary man who manages to plant a tree, build a home, and sire a son.

And yet ... Homer’s story contains something more or “different” than would follow from the model of “home gravity”, some sort of a disturbing, decentralising force that cannot be disposed of with the words: “secret” or “symbol”. Its symptom is probably the fact that this archetypal man, a model for each of us, does not actually plant a tree but cuts it down. The primary, “castration” gesture as if *s u s p e n d s* and questions the totalising force of its (quasi-ritual) repetition in a story that is supposed to complete the circle of the journey and bind its two ends; a repetition that with the assistance of the sign (“great sign”) – resembling a signature or a seal – is to confirm or restore Odysseus’ subjective identity formed by long-term absence. If one were to place one’s trust in Plato then the spirit of Odysseus attained peace not after returning to Ithaca but after death, in the next embodiment: *from memory of its former toils having flung away ambition, went about for a long time in quest of the life of an ordinary citizen who minded his own business*.⁴

Two (at least) circumstances in particular incline us to doubt this open interpretation of *The Odyssey* or, more exactly, to enhance the text by including those doubts. True, they will not produce some sort of a different conclusion, but they weaken and “deconstruct” the first, envisaged as the only possible one.

Cyclicness

An intriguing commentary to Homer’s epic is to be found in Jules Verne’s *Voyage au centre de la Terre*.⁵ Although it contains only a single mention of *The Odyssey*, the latter without doubt remains its key context. As we probably all well remember, the protagonists of this unusual “Ulysses-type” book set off on their journey from the home of Professor Lidenbrock in Hamburg, to which they return at the end – this “old home” is possibly a subtle allusion to the home of Odysseus: *it stood firm, thanks to an old elm which buttressed it in front*. A further route leads the narrator and remaining protagonists to Iceland, a land *not rich enough to possess clocks*,⁶ where following the steps of the sixteenth-century alchemist Arne Saknussemm they enter the Sneffels crater to submerge in a subterranean abyss. This is a journey to the “sources of time”: in the huge Cyclopean cave they encounter antediluvian monsters and at its very bottom – their ancestor: a hairy giant watching over a herd of mastodons. Then suddenly they make their way to the surface thanks to the eruption of another volcano.

“*Dove noi siamo?*” [...]. “*Come si chiama questa isola?*” – one of the travellers asks a child they encountered.

“*Stromboli*”, replied the rickety little shepherd [...]. *Stromboli! What effect on the imagination did these few words produce! We were in the centre of the Mediterranean, amidst the eastern archipelago of mythological memory, in the ancient Strongylos, where Aeolus kept the wind and the tempest chained up*.⁷

The Jules Verne interpretation distinguishing a certain fragment of *The Odyssey* and perceiving in it a separate whole confirms an intuition that accompanied me from the first time I read *The Odyssey* and before I even associated it with the novel by the French author. Here is a model of the whole itinerary of Odysseus (*Apologos, The Odyssey, Songs IX-XII*):

The diagram features special symmetry: among the 15 locations reached by the traveller (including Ilium and Ithaca), the central, eighth one is the furthest stage of the journey, the dark land of the Kimmerians, where Odysseus performed the *nekyia* rite enabling him to meet souls leaving Erebus. This geometric construction (its symmetrical character is enhanced by

1. Troy (Ilium)

2. Cicones (Ismarus)

3. Lotus-eaters

4. Cyclops

5. Aeolus

6. Lajstrygoni (Telepyla)

7. Circe (Aia)

8. Kimmerians (Hades)

15. Ithaca

14. Phaeacians (Scherië)

13. Calypso (Ogygia)

12. Thrinacia

11. Scylla and Charybdis

10. Sirens

9. Circe (Aia)

two stays with Circe) delineates the intersection of life and death with the precision of a measuring rod.

Here is a sub-cycle that constitutes a summary of the whole, together with its central *katabasis*, i.e. descent into the cave of Polyphemus. This is a unique *via brevis*, a narratively cohesive miniature (which philological commentaries appear not to notice) of the adventures of Odysseus – preserving and even accentuating their initiation logic, so well recreated in the Verne novel.

(proximity of Ithaca → storms, dangerous winds proximity of Ithaca → storms, dangerous winds)

1. Lotus-eaters

3. Aeolus

2. Cyclops

This fragment of *The Odyssey* ends with two sudden tempests. The first precedes arrival in the land of the Lotus-eaters: *But Zeus, the Cloud-Gatherer, stirred the north wind against our ships, in a blinding tempest, hiding the land and sea alike in cloud, while darkness swept from the sky. Headlong the ships were driven [...] Now I would have reached home safely, but as I was rounding Cape Malea, the north wind and waves and the ocean currents beat me away, off course, past Cythera.* (IX, 67-81).

The mentioned Cape Malea, the most south-easterly of the Balkan Peninsula, resembling a finger pointing at nearby Crete and separated from Kytera by a mere strait, has been always regarded by the Greeks as exceptionally dangerous for sailors. In *The Odyssey* this is the spot where other commanders returning from Troy – Menelaus (III, 287) and Agamemnon (V, 514-17) – began their errant wanderings across unfamiliar regions; earlier (in the chronology of the world of the myths), this was also the fate of the Argonauts returning from Colchis. Researchers agree that, as Alfred Hauberk claims, *after the storm off Cape Malea (IX, 80-81) Odysseus has crossed a fundamental boundary, normally closed to mortals, which separates the real and the unreal worlds; [...] It is in these circumstances a quite pointless undertaking, and one based on completely false premises, to try to plot on a map the route taken by Odysseus.*⁸ The same opinion was shared by, e.g. Kazimierz Kumaniecki (*Inasmuch as heretofore journeys by Odysseus took place in the real world /.../ from the moment of the storm we find ourselves in a world of fantasy*)⁹ or J. V. Luce (*On a map one can follow only the beginning of Odysseus' journey. (...) Leaving behind Cape Malea and Kytera he sailed on the wide open sea towards the south-west of Crete. From this point it is impossible to mark on a map the further course of his wandering. Kytera is the last location in his travels, which can be identified to the final return to Ithaca.*)¹⁰

The place and circumstances in which Odysseus left the world of mortals do not give rise to doubts, but those of his return remain unclear. When did he

manage to extricate himself from the netherworld? Naturally, with the assistance of the Phaeacians he “ultimately” landed on the shores of Ithaca. It is worth recalling, however, that earlier Odysseus almost reached his target. First, before he was caught in a tempest, and then when he left the Aeolian Island and sailed successfully thanks to conducive winds (the god of winds trapped the menacing ones in a sack): *We glimpsed our native land. We came in so close we could see the men who tend the beacon fires (X, 29).* Then, although this was an improbable circumstance, Odysseus fell asleep and his companions, as we know, *untied the bag. All the winds rushed out— storms seized them, swept them out to sea, in tears, away from their own native land.* This is the reason why (as Homer summed up Odysseus' subsequent recollections; XXIII, 315) *it was not yet his destiny to reach his dear native land. Instead, storm winds once more caught him.* It is worth recalling, however, that at the very onset of *The Odyssey* the goddess Athena describes Odysseus' sad but sweet servitude under Calypso: *But Odysseus yearns to see even the smoke rising from his native land and longs for death.*

The scene with the sack is one of the most disturbing images in *The Odyssey*. I cannot think about it without recalling a scene from my childhood when as a young boy I watched a popular Italian TV series: *L'Odisea* (director: Franco Rossi), which in a highly intriguing fashion showed the moment when Odysseus' companions untied the sack full of wind offered by Aeolus. The authors suggested that Odysseus was only pretending to be asleep but actually was aware of what his crew was doing; nonetheless, he tried not to create an obstacle, pretending that this was his intention. (Just as interestingly, it was this particular scene in the several parts-long series that made the greatest impression on me – so intense that even today I can recollect it vividly). True, Erich Auerbach claimed: *This “real” world into which we are lured, exists for itself, contains nothing but itself; the Homeric poems conceal nothing*¹¹, but there appears the moment when in a uniform and brightly lit narration, ostensibly limited exclusively to the foreground (as Auerbach envisaged it), there emerges a dark surprising fissure – an understatement, so unexpected in the case of Homer.

The astonishing fiasco of the attempt at returning to Ithaca forced the protagonist to make a new effort – once again he must allow himself to be *captured by the storm*. This is not the end, however, and even the successful return to Ithaca will not be *ultimate*, in accordance with the prediction made by Tiresias (XI, 120 sqq.) Odysseus once again departs. In this manner, his story as a whole takes on a *cyclic* character, making it possible to propose a different interpretation of the status of the place that is the beginning and end of the journey, i.a. Ithaca, the birthplace. The activity

pursued by Odysseus and conceived as an archetype of a person returning home gains automatism typical for the cyclical quality, but also futility in the meaning mentioned by Aristotle, who, recall, claimed that *automatikos* is etymologically affiliated with *maten*, "to no avail".¹²

Identity

Now, return to the "olive tree proof". What does this "great sign" denote if it is to be really treated as such, i.e. in semiotic categories. In other words, who should be regarded as its *signifié*? Obviously, the answer must be sought in traditional symbolic, in mythological imagery known from the works of Eliade and Jung or even the "poetics of reverie" by Bachelard (tree, root, fount, home, centre, cosmogony, etc.). At the same time, the "great sign" fulfils certain narration functions and is supposed to render credible the declaration made by Odysseus – it is a gesture with whose help he casts off his numerous costumes (including the fictitious identity of a Cretan, who in an earlier conversation with Penelope he pretended to be). Apparently, this is the place of transition from the order of seductive and deceitful fiction, and persuasive rhetoric (an order of soft and mellifluous words)¹³ to an order of finally regained truth (this is, as we learn, "an infallible sign"). The story about the marital bed, however, also inclines the married couple to immediately lie down on it so as to satisfy their urge for love: the "subjective centre" is thus inevitably connected with desire.

First and foremost, however, I would like to draw attention to the fact that this centre of the home sphere (Greek: *kentron* – sting, blade, from: *kentein*, to prick; Latin: *punctum*) is connected directly with that, which is most distant. In the same way as during the *nekyia* rite in the distant land of the Kimmerians (*via longa*) where Odysseus met the person closest to him, i.e. his deceased mother, so the cut down olive tree – that root of his identity – brings to mind the wooden stake, which he used to blind Polyphemus (*via brevis*): *There lay beside a sheep-pen a great club of the Cyclops, a staff of green olive-wood, which he had cut to carry with him when dry; and as we looked at it we thought it as large as is the mast of a black ship of twenty oars [...] I bade my comrades cast lots among them, which of them should have the hardihood with me to lift the stake and grind it into his eye when sweet sleep should come upon him* (IX, 319-333).

The similarity of the toppled olive tree designating the centre of Odysseus' homestead and the cut down olive tree twisted in the manner of a screw and burning out the round, central eye of Cyclops (*kyklops* = *kyklos*, wheel + *ops*, sight), is the reason why the scene in the Cyclopean cave introduces a *b s e n c e* (or rather the *p r e s e n c e* of absence) in the very centre, in the foundation of domestic space. It

also becomes a model for Odysseus' problematic subjectivity or, more exactly, it defines it as such. The anonymity that he announces to Polyphemus is more than a transitory state characteristic for certain initiation rite situations. Is it really anonymity? Perhaps Alkinoos, the king of the Phaeacians, was right when he said to Odysseus: *For there is no one of all mankind who is nameless* (VIII, 552). Odysseus encountering Polyphemus is not simply anonymous, because anonymity is his name:

Cyclops, thou askest me of my glorious name, and I will tell it thee; and do thou give me a stranger's gift, even as thou didst promise. Noman [Outis] is my name, Noman do they call me-my mother and my father, and all my comrades as well.

He is, therefore, not *anonymous* but *cryptonymous*, or *pseudonymos*. This is, however, a false name, more of a pseudonym that only ostensibly conceals (actually betrays) his true identity based, after all, on "falsehood", the principle of pseudonymy. This is also what the contents of the assumed name tell us. True, Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote about Odysseus: *No man, and thus just like all others*,¹⁴ but this does not have to be the case of being average and ordinary, and even more so "without character", "without qualities" (*ohne Eigenschaften*). The Greek *Outis* is composed of a negative particle (*out*) and the pronoun: "someone" (*tis*). The same pronoun – both in such expressions as: "this is someone", "to be someone" – means both in Polish and Greek admiration and recognition, and is a social distinction, emphasis on subjective distinctiveness. Its negation, as a consequence, defines the "villain", a man without value, without *m e a n i n g*, who, we tend to say, does not *r e p r e s e n t* anything and is a "zero" both in the ethical sense (as in the insult: "you're a zero") and semiotically, enabling a paraphrase of the lofty formula: "And his name shall be. ..."; in this case – "it shall be zero". Man-nobody, the Odyssean *outis*, fulfils a logical function similar to the "zero" in arithmetic, which as such does not express value and is a condition for changing the value of all other numbers (cf. the English: *cypher* – number, code, zero; not by accident one of the protagonists in the film *Matrix* is called *Cypher*).¹⁵ *Outis* thus means the absence of defined, stabilised subjectivity (cf. the Latin: *nemo*, "no one", a word created by merging *non* and *homo*; we all remember that this is the "true pseudonym" one of Verne's protagonists), which suffers from the lack of a source and calls for incessant supplementation, an ever provisory *suture* (to use the commendable Lacanian term) of barely possible and at all times transitory meaning, ever dependent upon a certain "system of difference". But there is something more: it comprises that possibility, the potential of meanings, i.e. a condition for all "representation", representation as such, in other words, still not stabilised by some sort of "refer-

ence” (Barthes called this conceit: *signifiance*, English: *significance*).¹⁶

It is not a coincidence that already in the first hexameter of *The Odyssey* Homer described Odysseus as *polutropos*, which could be translated as: worldly, cunning, highly enterprising, but also as: endowed with an unusual ability for changing costumes, for impersonating assorted, usually fictitious figures. Hence the *anagnorisis*, so frequent in *The Odyssey*, i. e. narration situations in which the protagonist becomes unexpectedly recognised (Aristarchus described *anagnōrismos* as the *telos* of *The Odyssey* [scholia to XXIII, 296]), because, after all, he may be “recognised” only when he first seems to be someone else. In this situation it is difficult to avoid asking: becomes recognised as whom? Is it not precisely as *polutropos*? Is talent for “disguise” and devising fictional stories not his true fate?

Stanisław Rosiek wrote: *Odysseus lived in a world that he had split into two parts: “illusory life” and “real life”, as Pascal would have put it. He was a master of split existence.*¹⁷ At the same time, things are different – this “delusion” is not so much a second, separate extreme of the opposition (*foris versus domi*) as the split, the fissure between extremities. It is that fissure, which is “erotic” and not one of the two “shores” (as Barthes would put it).¹⁸ If this is the case, then Odysseus is himself the more the longer he stays away from Ithaca, even if he yearns for it so much, or rather the more he longs for it. The “distant” (*this yearning for the distant*, as Thomas Mann described the feeling experienced by Gustav Aschenbach) does not leave him even while at home (*domi*) and makes it impossible to get rid of the status of a “stranger”, a “guest” and a “beseecher” (*hiketes*). As I have mentioned, the “distant” or the “split” of Odysseus’ world no longer separates Ithaca from the unreal rest of the world but actually is that unreality, “fictionality” that permeates the whole of existence, including the “genuine” home life of Odysseus on Ithaca.

Instead of a stable “centre” we discover a “void” (*outis*), which, as Derrida wrote in his reflections about the philosophical concept of the structure, is the “movement of supplementarity” initiating an endless “play of substitutions” (the same, let me recall, as the one mentioned in the epithet: *polutropos*). This *substitute does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow existed before it*. We thus arrive at the conclusion (I quote Derrida while keeping in mind the text by Homer): *That there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything*

became discourse-provided - we can agree on this word - that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely”¹⁹

Replacing the stable “centre” by a *sui generis* “non-place”, a process of undermining the presence of the source of *signifié*, making possible an endless substitution of signs, rendered Odysseus a “poet,” and his journey – a nostalgic “art” of returning home (in Greek: *nostos* means “return”, *algos* – “suffering”, although it is worth keeping in mind that “nostalgia” is a modern lexical idea). David Lachterman wrote: *Odysseus achieves his nostos [...] by means of poetry, by telling and crafting tales [...]. What Odysseus tells, is his odyssey proper, his nostos and noos in words.*²⁰ Hence, Odysseus does not travel in reality and sometimes, especially upon returning, he goes back to his peregrinations in his tales, the latter being a journey conducted in the sphere of “language”, “fiction”, and thus the irremovable “distant”, in a fascinating space opened by the Song of the Sirens (according to Blanchot).²¹ Nothing, therefore, can end it, no port, no final conclusion, and even no “great sign”, since it is “nothing” - a mere story about what is lost for ever and the object of infinite longing.

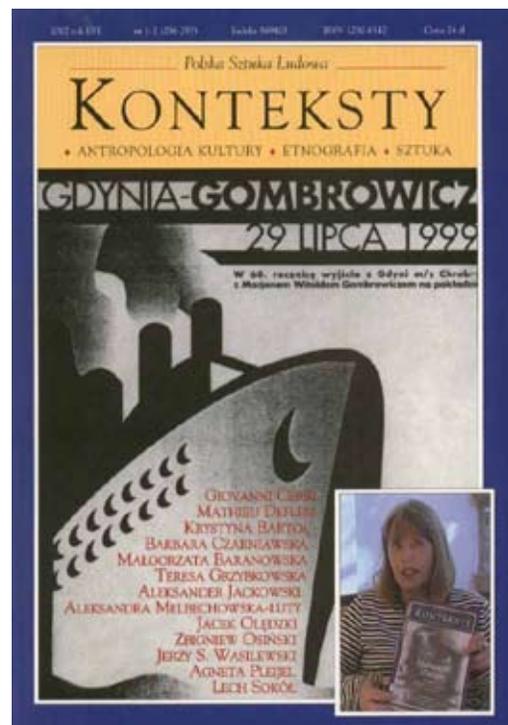
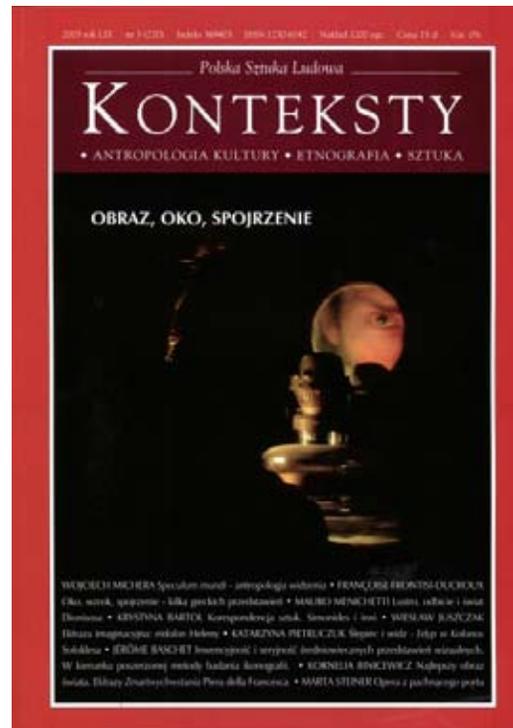
It is often maintained that the feature that best characterises Odysseus is his “curiosity”, which was supposed to incite him to leave Ithaca (this was the view of, e.g. Dante [*Inferno* 26]). In this way, however, Ithaca too remains untouched – and as a home it still constitutes a stable centre of existence. The reading of *The Odyssey*, which I proposed, naturally questions the obviousness of this interpretation: I tried to demonstrate that this text contains another concealed mechanism. At the end, in order to provide at least a temporary tag line, let me cite Gabriel Marcel, whose words I noted down years ago; quoting them I am not overly concerned whether I am faithful to the context, i.e. the entire reflection of this philosopher:

To be curious – to leave a certain immobile centre, to attempt to capture an object about which one had only an unclear or schematic concept. With this meaning all curiosity is directed towards the peripheries. On the other hand, to be restless is to be uncertain of one’s centre, to seek one’s equilibrium. [...] Curiosity will turn into unrest the more its object will constitute a part of me, the more thoroughly it will be included into my inner structure. On the other hand, anxiety will become metaphysical the more it pertains to that, which cannot be separated from my “Ego” without, at the same time, causing the annihilation of that “Ego”.²²

Endnotes

- ¹ Beata Spieralska, *Dach nad głową. Pojęcie „domu” w językach indoeuropejskich*, "Konteksty" 2004, fasc. 1-2, p. 34.
- ² Vincenzo Vitiello, *Pustynia, Ethos, Opuszczenie. Przyczynek do topologii religijności*, transl. Ewa Łukaszuk, in: *Religia. Seminarium na Capri prowadzone przez Jacquesa Derridę i Giannię Vattimo*, KR: Warszawa 1999, p. 177.
- ³ *Maski*, vol. II, Maria Janion and Stanisław Rosiek (ed.), Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1986, p. 184 (my emphasis – W. M.).
- ⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 620c (Myth of Er).
- ⁵ Jules Verne, *Voyage au centre de la Terre*, ed. J. Hetzel, Paris 1864.
- ⁶ [...] and the clock of which would then have struck twelve, if any Icelandic church had been rich enough to possess so valuable and useful an article. These sacred edifices are, however, very much like these people, who do without watches—and never miss them. (ibid.).
- ⁷ Ibid., Polish edition, p. 304. On this book and the images and mythological structures therein see: Simone Vierre, *Jules Verne et le roman initiatique. Contribution à l'étude de l'imaginaire*, Lille 1972; see also: Maria Janion, *Gorączka romantyczna*, Warszawa 1975, pp. 275-277. The Aeolian Islands were associated with the Lipari Islands and Stromboli already in antiquity (see, e.g. Tucidides III, 88; Virgil, *The Aeneid* VIII, 417).
- ⁸ Alfred Heubeck, *Introduction*, in: *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey*, vol. II, ed. A. Heubeck, Arie Hoekstra, Oxford 1989, p. 4.
- ⁹ Kazimierz Kumaniecki, in: *Homer*, ed. K. Kumaniecki and J. Mańkowski, Warszawa 1974, p. 165.
- ¹⁰ J. V. Luce, *Homer i epoka heroiczna*, transl. E. Skrzypczak, Warszawa 1987, p. 267.
- ¹¹ Erich Auerbach, *Bliźna Odyseusza*, in: idem, *Mimesis, Rzeczywistość przedstawiona w literaturze Zachodu*, vol. I, transl. Zbigniew Żabicki, Warszawa 1968, p. 62.
- ¹² Aristotle, *Physics* 197b.
- ¹³ See: W. Michera, 'Lathesthai'. O pokusie zapomnienia, "Konteksty" 2-3/2003, pp. 217-222.
- ¹⁴ Jerzy Andrzejewski, *Nikt*, Warszawa 1987, p. 11.
- ¹⁵ See: W. Michera, *Ekranizacja pamięci. O filmie Memento Christophera Nolana*, in: *Iluzje pamięci*, ed. S. Wróbel, Wydawnictwo WPA UAM, Kalisz 2007, pp. 81-97.
- ¹⁶ See: Roland Barthes, *The Third Meaning*, [in:] *Image, Music, Text*, transl. Stephen Heath, Fontana Press, p. 54: *Signifiance, a word which has the advantage of referring to the field of signifier (and not signification)*. See also: R. Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, Seuil, Paris 1973, p. 82. The term: *signifiance* comes from: Julia Kristeva, *Semiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Seuil, Paris 1969.
- ¹⁷ Stanisław Rosiek, op. cit.
- ¹⁸ Cf. R. Barthes, *Le plaisir...*, pp. 13-14.
- ¹⁹ J. Derrida, Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, transl. Alan Bass, The University of Chicago 1978, pp. 353-354, 365.
- ²⁰ David R. Lachterman, 'Noos' and 'nostos': *The Odyssey and the Origins of Greek Philosophy*, [in:] J.-F. Mattéi (ed.) *La naissance de la raison en Grèce, Actes du Congrès de Nice 1987*, Paris 1990, p. 37 (Polish edition: 'Noos' i 'nostos': 'Odyseja' i źródła filozofii greckiej, transl. W. Michera, "Konteksty" 2-3/2003).
- ²¹ Maurice Blanchot, *Le chant de Sirènes*, in: *Le livre à venir*,

- Gallimard: Paris 2005 (1959), p. 9 sqq. It must be stressed, however, that Blanchot judged Odysseus primarily within the context of the battle with the Sirens, i.a. by stressing the technical effort of maintaining a boundary between the real and the imagined (see: p. 16). One could say, therefore, that the purpose of this essay is to show the simultaneous presence in the Odyssey of a competing model, i.e. the ideological proximity of Odysseus and the Sirens.
- ²² Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator*, transl. P. Lubicz, IW Pax: Warszawa 1984, p. 142.



During the epoch of my artistic beginnings in about 1930 it was demanded that a person should be predominantly authentic. (...) I, however, remember that already as a boy I knew - and this was instinctive knowledge - that it is impossible to be "authentic" or "defined"...

I admire science, (...) but I fear that it is impossible to eliminate that word "I", it is a much too strong part of us.

(Witold Gombrowicz,
Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą)

In *Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą* Witold Gombrowicz conducted an interview with himself, and responding to successive questions he "justified" his philosophical inspirations and assumed the language of scientific discourse. This is a "game played with the scientific": the author simultaneously scoffed and spoke quite seriously. In his witty, brief text, science - philosophy, anthropology - is used as a manner of keeping a distance towards oneself. The characteristic feature of this instrument is a split of the language, which creates the distance. A fissure.

That, which Gombrowicz regarded as a merely episodic game with the convention of "the scientific" - one of the many cases in his "laboratory of the form" - became a fundamental creative strategy (but also a life strategy) for several protagonists connected in their youth with Surrealism. Michel Leiris and Roger Caillois are the authors of two strange autobiographies: *L'Âge d'homme* and an autobiographical essay unpublished during the author's lifetime: *La Nécessité d'esprit*. Leiris began working on *L'Âge d'homme* before he was thirty years old, while Caillois wrote *La Nécessité d'esprit*, his first book, while aged less than twenty. Two books, treating autobiography in a truly Surrealistic manner, tell the story of a non-experienced life, which had actually just started.

L'Âge d'homme and *La Nécessité d'esprit* also pertain to another theme, albeit in a manner far from obvious: the attitude of the authors to "the scientific". Regardless how one perceives this, Leiris and Caillois were, after all, scholars (an ethnographer and a sociologist). Their learned analyses could yield the impression that science - in this case, anthropology - is not a purpose in itself, that things are not as they should be. This is the case of some sort of insincerity, of "something else" being at stake: here, anthropology can be a metaphor, a mask or a theatrical costume. At times, the texts are closer to the mocking quasi-scientific nature of Gombrowicz's *Byłem pierwszym strukturalistą* than to genuine "Science". How is one to trust Leiris if in the wake of his extremely subjective *L'Afrique fantôme*, whose premise was a negation of all scientific methods, he wrote two academic and meticulous books about the language of the Dogon people and Ethiopian possession cults?

TOMASZ SZERSZEŃ

Anthropology as a Mask, a Costume, a Metaphor: the Case of Michel Leiris and Roger Caillois

In the case of Leiris, interest in ethnography coincided in time with the commencement of work on *L'Âge d'homme*. This was also the moment when he became involved in editing the avant-garde periodical "Documents", in which anthropology and ethnography were for the first time applied as a *sui generis* quasi-scientific quality, a scientific discourse shifted, opened, sometimes mocked and simultaneously illusively proposed precisely as a scientific discourse.¹ It was for the needs of "Documents" that Leiris "assumed the guise of an ethnographer" and adapted himself - in the manner of one of the insects described by Caillois - to "writing science".

Interpreters ignore the fact that the publication of *L'Âge d'homme* more or less coincided with Leiris winning the title of a professional ethnographer. The time in which he wrote his curious autobiography thus ideally overlaps with becoming an ethnographer - first studied publications, first written texts, an expedition to Africa, and successive passed exams. The Leiris *Bildungsroman* is, therefore, also a metaphor of initiation into ethnography, a literary equivalent of *rite de passage*. After the publication of *L'Âge d'homme* Leiris began work at the Parisian Musée de l'Homme where he held a high post. "Being an ethnographer" thus became a fact, a social role, a permanent mask, which the author of *L'Afrique fantôme* treated very seriously, as evidenced by the fact that his studies at the Musée were used only for scientific pursuits; he wrote poetry at home.

Leiris was deeply concerned with becoming an ethnographer and the ensuing consequences. Paradoxically, probably the most interesting commentary are his theses in a book about zâr cults: *La Possession et ses aspects théâtraux chez les Éthiopiens de Gondar*, with Leiris developing some of the conceptions from Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*: in the fashion of Sartre's waiter the possessed plays with his status in order to realise it.² While describing the cult and its participants Leiris metaphorically depicted his personal situation: he constantly played with the status of man of science, of

“being an ethnographer”, in order to realise this situation. Similarly as in the zâr cult where, as he wrote, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish cases of authentic possession (“the experienced theatre”) and possession feigned for the sake of gaining some sort of benefit (“the performed theatre”), reading texts by the author of *L’Afrique* we never know for certain whether he was not merely performing the role of an ethnographer.

The case of Roger Caillois is much more complicated since the costume of the scholar which he donned fits him perfectly. This personality trait was excellently captured by Emil Cioran in his sketch: Caillois commenced fittingly, by studying and even behaving like a student, as testified by the reservations he made in *L’Âge d’homme* (1939), in which he put his teachers’ minds at rest by requesting that they ignore the last pages of the book in which he took the liberty of transgressing the limits of “positive thought” and developed several metaphysical reflections. At the time, he produced the impression that he believed the history of religion, sociology and ethnology...³ Cioran, therefore, refused to be seduced and did not really have faith in the scientific guise of Caillois: there, where others saw an academician he observed an actor wearing a costume. Accounts by some students at the College of Sociology reflect this feeling of maladjustment: at the time of the lectures Caillois was only slightly over twenty years of age – “too little” for a serious scholar and desperately clinging onto theoretical language and academic distance. True, the attitude of the author of *L’homme et le sacré* to “the scientific” is something of an obsession. In his works from that early period Caillois incessantly posed and opted for the defensive. He not only “calmed the teachers”, as Cioran noticed, but also performed a series of reservations: in a preface to *La Nécessité d’esprit* he wrote that his work was a document, whose interpretation was also a document.⁴ We find ourselves in a domain of science to the umpteenth degree, science with a capital S. The same motif was broached by Denis Hollier in his essay: *Crainte et tremblement à l’âge du surréalisme: Caillois’ work is hard to categorize. But not for the same reason as Bastille’s, Blanchot’s or even Sartre’s; Caillois does not mix registers of discourse, nor does oscillate between theory and fiction. Instead, his work is hard to categorize because of the perverse way he chooses to play, almost excessively, in the less literary of those two registers: the theoretical. (...) These defensive origins may explain why it is so difficult to situate his work within the typology of theoretical writings. There is something heterodoxical, oblique, disquieting, and even occasionally hypocritical in the relation to knowledge that Caillois’ writing puts into play. In his essays erudition tilts toward destabilising adventures that function quite differently from a search for truth. Caillois was one of Jorge Luis Borges’ first French translators. In order to exorcize the temptations of fiction he adapted the mask of science in*

*a way that recalls Borges’ imaginary encyclopaedias. But the science in question is unrecognizable; it seems to have become its own double.*⁵

The author’s self-portrait as a thorough academician ceases, however, to be uniform and obvious when we reach for his posthumously published *La Nécessité d’esprit*, in which Caillois tried to capture the essence of poetic imagination *in statu nascendi* as exemplified by his own person. This poetic imagination is to be X-rayed and described with the assistance of the most scientific instruments possible – scientific rigour is to be a response to *écriture automatique* while an examination of inner “necessities” and “rigours” is to replace an unfettered game of the imagination, that prime slogan of the Surrealists.

La Nécessité d’esprit, a strange, marginal attempt at redefining Breton’s vision of Surrealism, is mysteriously connected with another text by Caillois. In his brilliant analysis contained in the essay: *Crainte et tremblement à l’âge du surréalisme* Denis Hollier drew attention that *La Mante Religieuse*, one of the earliest and, at the same time, best known texts by the author of *L’homme et le sacré*, was originally planned as part of the autobiographical *La Nécessité d’esprit*. The first version of *La Mante Religieuse* was issued in “Minotaure” in 1933, and at the end of the text Caillois announced that the next part would deal with his “personal experiences”. There was no subsequent part, however, since Caillois resigned from the publication of *La Nécessité d’esprit* and *La Mante Religieuse* appeared in the collection: *Le Mythe et l’homme*, but already without any personal or autobiographical allusions.

From the very first moment the praying mantis draws man’s attention to its silhouette⁶ – Caillois wrote. True, Hollier recalled that during the vacations of 1928 Caillois actually saw a praying mantis for the first time. The same day, we must believe the systematic researcher, marked Caillois’ sexual initiation. The connection between the praying mantis and autobiography thus becomes obvious. We are dealing with another, after Leiris’ Judith, astonishing autobiographical component involving a woman killing a man and the motif of decapitation since, the author argued, a praying mantis can live without its head. Here is a comment by Denis Hollier: *Indeed, it is difficult to avoid an impression of defeatism when one sees a man choose to expose his first person, choose to expose himself in the first person, in front of a maneater. And what the material history of the text relates, what happened to the text itself between the time Caillois wrote it and the time he published it, is, literally, the defeat of the first person, since the versions published by the author in his lifetime eliminate all personal references. It is as if the first person of the autobiography (The Necessity of the Mind) had been gnawed away, dissolved from within, before being absorbed and assimilated by the third person of the study on the pray-*

ing mantis (*Le myth et homme*). It is difficult, here, not to speculate on this double disappearance, the coincidence that inflicts on the author's first person the fate that befalls the masculine partner of the tragic love he relates. (...) The female's devouring (outside the text) of her sexual partner is echoed by the text's devouring of its foretext. It is as if the meeting with the mantis had the effect of depersonalizing Caillois' voice: his first person, at least his literary first person, did not survive *The Necessity of the Mind*.⁷ Ending his analysis, Holier returned to *La Nécessité d'esprit*, which he described as: *the autobiography of a subject literally possessed by his own absence*.⁸ The praying mantis, in the fashion of Judith, is thus associated with an autobiographical project of describing emptiness, a life not yet experienced, whose place was taken by science.

Science - sociology, anthropology - was for Caillois a mask concealing the temptation of writing an autobiography, a metaphor of his existential situation. Underneath the costume of a thoroughgoing scientific stance something else is hidden. At the time of his earliest works Caillois admired St. Ignatius of Loyola. The author of *La Mante Religieuse* recalled that Loyola's example first inspired him to start the periodical "Inquisitions", and then, in 1937, to establish the College of Sociology. Caillois described the science pursued at the College as "holy sociology". Could it be that Caillois, that exemplary researcher, authentically, albeit in a cleverly concealed manner, experienced the force of vocation? In 1947 the critic Roland (sic!) Caillois published in "Critique" an article about Caillois and the College: *Roger Caillois ou l'inquisiteur sans église*.⁹ It describes Caillois' severe intellectual rigour by comparing him to Loyola but the kind of Loyola who became familiar with Durkheim and attended courses held by Marcel Mauss. It is highly likely that inspired by the Jesuit spirit Caillois treated writing/studies as "spiritual exercise" of sort, which, after all, as Roland Barthes proved in his sketch about St. Ignatius, is a "search for the language" (*The invention of a language - this is then the object of the Exercises*¹⁰). Jesuit discipline and severity implemented by Caillois at the College had a second, darker, and certainly less well-known side: it involved political motifs carefully camouflaged by a scientific costume. Years later, Caillois described that strange commitment on the very eve of the war (recall, the College was active in 1937-1939): *It was particularly true among those of us who had founded the College de Sociologie, dedicated exclusively to the study of closed groups: societies of men in primitive populations, initiatory communities, sacerdotal brotherhoods, heretical or orgiastic sects, monastic or military orders, terrorist organisations, and secret political associations of the Far East or from the murky periods in European history. We were enthralled by the resolve of those men who, from time to time throughout history, apparently wished to give firm*

laws to the undisciplined society that could not satisfy their desire for rigor. With sympathy we observed the progress of those people who withdrew from such a society in disgust and went to live elsewhere, under harsher institutions. However, some among us, who were full of fervour, could not readily resign themselves to merely interpreting; they were impatient to act for themselves.¹¹

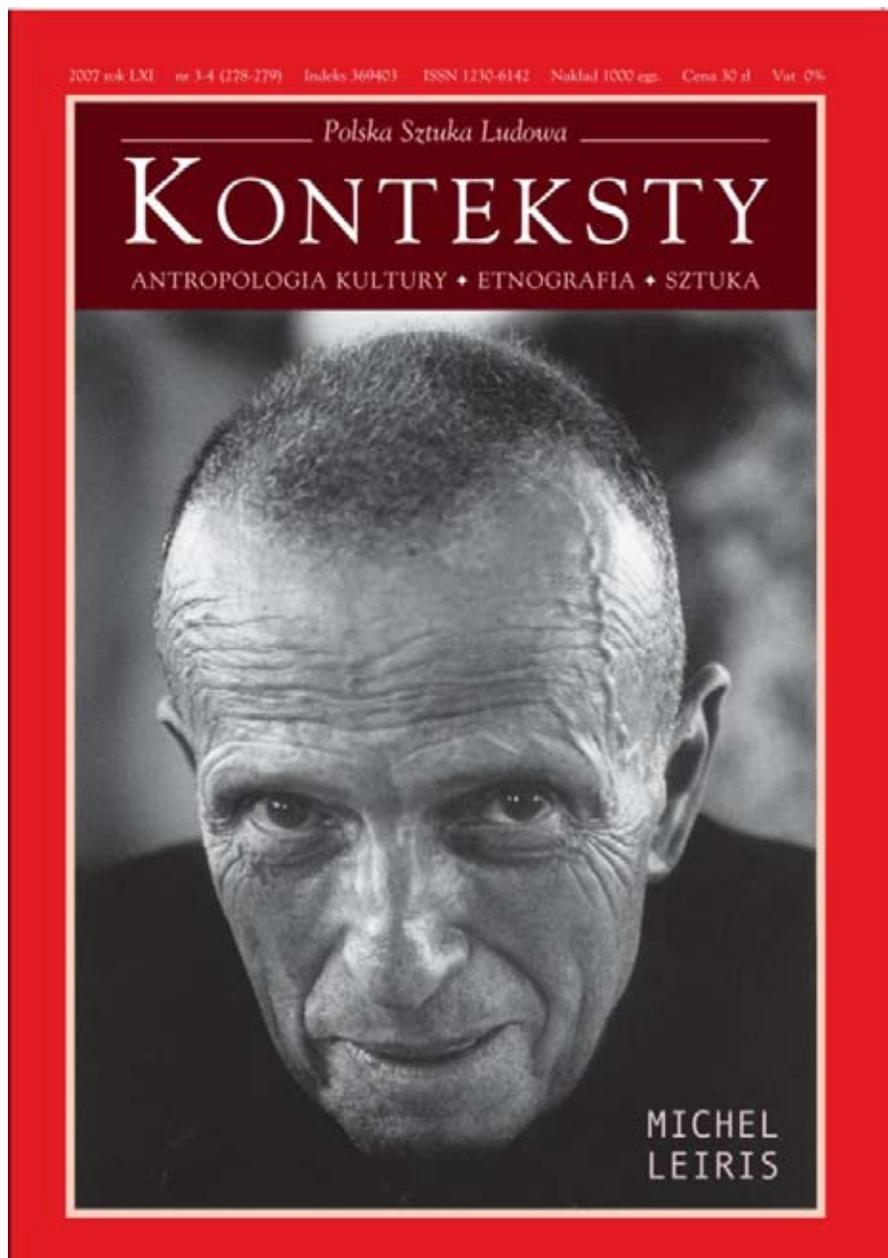
While discussing stands of the French intellectuals during the 1930s, Zee Sternhell, an historian of French political thought, drew attention to the fact that resistance against fascism was never frontal, but assumed assorted forms of mimetic subversion, which adapts and reverses the direction of the words uttered by the enemy in an attempt to precede him in his own terrain and vanquish him while deploying his weapons.¹² This chameleon strategy was applied at the time by Bataille and, predominantly, by Caillois. During those years, their political ideas, disturbing and genuinely schizophrenic, oscillated between two extremes: communism and fascism. The ambivalence was expanded to such a degree that Jacques Bénét, a reviewer writing for *Cahiers du Sud* and discussing the views expounded by Caillois, accused him of fascist sympathies; then, in an erratum he significantly corrected his opinion by admitting that Caillois did harbour communist sympathies, adding that this in no way changed his thesis.¹³ This authentic story says much about Caillois: we shall not commit abuse if we say that he suffered from psychasthenia – a psychological disorder characteristic for an inability to make a decision. Caillois rendered psychasthenia the topic of one of his first texts (also published in "Minotaure"): *Mimétisme et psychasthenie légendaire*, linking it with mimicry – the assumption of camouflage. Could it be that the costume of a scholar and the mask of methodical knowledge were to serve Caillois for a masterful description of his own psychic and existential situation? Was the theory of the ambivalence of the *sacrum* and its bipolar features - recall: right and left, two elements of the *sacrum*: in the heart of one we always find a particle of the other – initiated during lectures at the College and expanded in *L'homme et le sacré*, actually a description of political ambivalence in which two extremities (right and left) were close and radically opposed the *profanum*, i.e. the (democratic) centre? Did the timid young scholar dream not only about secret societies but also about solutions far exceeding the rules of democracy?

The texts by Leiris and Caillois are the reason why we remain helpless. We shall never know for certain the nature of that, which had been proposed for a scientific discourse. Perhaps it is a metaphor, a mask? A game played with textual mirrors, in which the authors supplied the best keys for the interpretation of their texts that, in turn, function as perverse self-comments? This is a science, which, as in the case of the headless *Acéphale*, is always missing something,

in which something is not in its right place: shifted, multiplied, treated lightly. This is a science created to destroy the naïve researcher just as the cruel praying mantis would do.

Endnotes

- ¹ K. Rutkowski, *Paluch*, "Konteksty" 3-4/2007, p. 257. This text is a commentary to Bataille's essay: *The Big Toe* in the last issue of "Documents" (no. 8/1930).
- ² J. Jamin, *Introduction*, in: M. Leiris, *Miroir de l'Afrique*, Gallimard 1996, pp. 40-44.
- ³ E. Cioran, *Ćwiczenia z zachwyty*, Warszawa 1998, p. 94.
- ⁴ R. Caillois, *La Nécessité d'esprit (avant-propos)*, Gallimard 1981, p. 18.
- ⁵ D. Hollier, *Crainte et tremblement à l'âge du surrealism*, in: *Les Dépossédés (Bataille, Caillois, Leiris, Malraux, Sartre)*, Paris 1993, pp. 131-132.
- ⁶ R. Caillois, *Modliszka*, in: *Odpowiedzialność i styl*, Warszawa 1967, p. 151.
- ⁷ D. Hollier, *Crainte et tremblement à l'âge du surrealism*, in: op. cit., p. 134.
- ⁸ D. Hollier, *Crainte et tremblement à l'âge du surrealism*, in: op. cit., p. 136. It is worth mentioning that the leitmotif of Hollier's book is composed of forms of this paradoxical presence-absence of the subject of an autobiography. The French title: *Les Dépossédés* and its English language version: *Absent without Leave*, excellently reflect this experience of emptiness: there is no need to lose one's life in order to die.
- ⁹ In: "Critique, no. 8-9/1947, p. 29.
- ¹⁰ R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 54.
- ¹¹ R. Caillois, *Approches de l'imaginaire*, Paris 1974, pp. 92-93.
- ¹² Z. Sternhell, *Ni droite ni gauche*, p. 267. Cf. also D. Hollier, *De l'équivoque entre littérature et politique*, in: *Les Dépossédés (Bataille, Caillois, Leiris, Malraux, Sartre)*, Paris 1993, pp. 109-130.
- ¹³ P. Missac, *Avec des cartes truquées*, "Cahiers du Sud", no. 216/1939.



Image, Crypt, Interpretation

Deciphering a symbol consists of divided halves of pre-symbolic unity re-assembling into a whole (*syn-ballein*). In the psychoanalytical sense, the split of this original unity yields the possibility of an emergence of the Unconscious. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török wrote:

*Psychoanalytical listening consists of a special way of treating language. Whereas normally we are given meanings, the analyst is given symbols. Symbols are data that are missing an as yet undetermined part [...]. The special aim of psychoanalytical listening is to find the symbol's complement, recovering it from indeterminacy. From the beginning of psychoanalysis to the present, theoretical efforts have been aimed at finding rules that will permit us to find the unknown missing complement, in other words, the fragment that "symbolizes with" – or, we might say, that "cosymbolizes".*¹

If we were to treat thus understood "psychoanalytical listening" as a simple model, based on analogy, of all sorts of interpretations of the narrative text – literary, film and painterly – then the task of the reader-spectator would consist of an identification of the concealed contents of the story (hidden deeper than its open and easily denoted theme), rendered dialectic by textual representation "interiorised" in it in such a way as if it were the patient's memory; it would also involve striving towards the establishment of source truth, the "primeval scene", the genuine "theme", the penetration "to the end" of its sense, etc. The difficulty of this task consists, however, of the fact that, as we found out in another study by Abraham, the symbol is **the outcome of a covert operation**.

So, originally, any symbol is a metaphor. It is the repression of its metaphoric origin that makes the symbol.

Naturally, repression from the very onset assumes a repression instrument. When, subsequently, the two parts are linked again the symbol ceases to be a symbol.

Interpretation, therefore, does not consist only of revealing the concealed ("repressed") contents. A condition for its effectiveness – and this is often forgotten – is to take into account also the instrument of repression.

The symbol is thus a dual metaphor of that, which is cut off and of the process of cutting as such. When we listen to the patient and treat his comments as symbolic we embark upon the recreation of the cut off part together with the moment of cutting (an introjection of the repressed) and the creation, on the level of the word, of new integrity.²

This is not all, nor is it the entire difficulty that can be posed by the interpreted story (of a patient). It also happens that **listening encounters a discourse, which, apparently, does not wish to take part in the quest for a co-symbol and rejects all attempts at supplementation. This resembles a situation when a puzzle totally conceals the discourse, much too dense for deciphering in the course of ordinary listening, or when the discourse does not lead to any sort of co-symbol or puzzle.**³

Metaphorisation does not succeed when instead of symbols the analyst receives in the interpreted narration "true enigmas". They come into being as a result of shattering the traditional topic structure of the symbol, i.e. when its second half – originally unclear and absent, and now thanks to analysis recovered (as the sought *signifié*) – becomes once again split apart; when the line of the split transfers deep into the recesses of the symbol, creating a "false", "artificial" unconsciousness that cannot be named and metaphorised, a *prosthetic* installed in the split "Ego". This is precisely the "crypt" and its "effect".

*

The concept of the "crypt" was proposed in the 1960s by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török, French psychoanalysts of Hungarian descent, who in a highly original fashion developed the thoughts of Sándor Ferenczi, student and collaborator of Sigmund Freud.⁴ The "crypt effect" was also described by Jacques Derrida in *Fors*, a copious preface to a book by Abraham and Török: *Cryptonymie. Le verbière de l'homme aux loups*.⁵

In the interpretation proposed by Derrida the "crypt" is one of those conceits that serve probing the boundaries of metaphysical spatial logic. As the readers of his successive books know such figures as: "supplement", *tympanum*, *hymen*, *pharmakon*, *khora*, *parergon*, *parages*, "invagination", etc. ..., in a model-like manner (but rather emulating the graphic models of "im-

possible figures”) deconstructed the simple antithesis of the interior and exterior comprehended “rationally” as cohesive, homogeneous, and symmetrical wholes.⁶ With their assistance Derrida constructed paradoxical topographies, in which this simple schematisation unexpectedly lost its transparency and revealed the “violence” inscribed within it – it “grew wild” and gained aporetic properties. In this *la cartographie impossible*, to cite Derrida, or *atopy*, the boundary between those two spheres shifted. In a classical interpretation, the frame (e.g. of a painting) tightly “closes” the interior, guaranteeing distinctness and intact original identity; at the same time – from the perspective of this interior – it “does not exist”. Derrida claimed that such a simple structure is impossible since total separation of the interior and the exterior is also unfeasible: in the text/image the cognitive (referential) aspect is always joined by a performative force, making it impossible to conclusively close the frames. This is the reason why the “edge”, conceived as an indispensable condition for “completing” the identity of the interior, becomes in the latter an irremovable “fold” of the exterior, undermining its completeness.

Such paradoxical spatiality is characteristic also for the model of human subjectivity constructed by Abraham and Török; hence Derrida’s interest in the concept of the crypt, which he tried to describe by using, i.a. the titular *fors*.

Since the French noun: *for* (plural: *fors*) is a greatly ambiguous word, and difficult to translate to boot, let us precede the quotation from Derrida with several explanations. This spatial description is affiliated with the Latin *forum*, i.e. a public square in Rome, the site of court trials – it denotes a “justice tribunal”. This is why the literary expression: *le for intérieur* (derived, historically speaking, from old legal terminology referring to Church jurisdiction) described an inner, most personal “tribunal of consciousness”, *sui generis* conscience. On the other hand, the interesting etymology of this word going back to the Indo-European language (**dhuer*, **dwer*) discloses its specifically “penetrating” sense (thus rendering it slightly similar to the Greek *krinein*: to “separate”, to “judge”, hence: “crisis” and “critic”). Suffice to recall that the Latin verb: *forare* means: “to perforate” (hence: “perforation”) and *foris* means: “door”, adverb – “on the outside”, just as *foris* signifies: “outside the door” (or from an opposite perspective: “go outside the door”, as in the Evangelical summons by Jesus: *Lazare, veni foras* – *Lazarus, come forth*). This is, therefore, the origin of the English: *foreign*, the Italian: *fuori*, or the French: *hors, dehors* as well as the noun: *forest, forêt* referring to outer, “alien” space, etc. Hence in French the form: *fors* (the plural) is an archaic preposition, which means: “without”, “with the exception of”, “while preserving”.

Interestingly, this is also the etymology of the Polish words: *drzwi* (doors) and *dwór* (outside). Not by accident is the second used in the expression “outside” (*na dworze*). It also signifies, as we know, a building (manor house: *dwór, dworek, dworzec*), which makes it possible to sometimes use the Old Polish *fora ze dwora* (get outside), with *dwór* meaning the interior. It also exists as *podwórze* and *podwórzec* (courtyard) or even *dwór królewski* (royal court), i.e. courtyard, patio or open space but inside a certain closed area. Already in our times, *dworzec* (station) is a place, which albeit localised within urban space opens up the town from the inside, thus making possible communication with the outside world.

With the assistance of the multi-meaning *fors* – contrasted with the French *hors* (“outside”, “on the outside”), or *le tribunal de la conscience* – Derrida attempted to situate the paradoxical space of the “crypt” in the construction of the subject. At the onset, however, he sketched its place in the architectural model (I cite this fragment while translating *for* as *dwór*)⁷ :

*Constructing a system of partitions, with their inner and outer surfaces, the cryptic enclave produces a cleft in space, in the assembled system of various places, in the architectonics of the open square within space, itself delimited by a generalized closure in the forum. Within this forum, space where the free circulation and exchange of objects and speeches can occur, the crypt constructs another, more inward forum [...]: sealed and thus internal to itself, a secret interior within the public square, but, by the same token, outside it, external to the interior. Whatever one might write upon them, the crypt’s parietal surfaces do not simply separate an inner forum [un for intérieur] from an outer forum [un for extérieur]. The inner forum is (a) safe, an outcast inside the inside. This is the condition, and the stratagem, of the cryptic enclave’s ability to isolate, to protect, to shelter from any penetration, from anything that can filter in from them outside along with air, light, or sounds, along with the eye or the ear, the gesture or the spoken word. Caulked or padded along its inner partition, with cement or concrete on the other side the cryptic safe protects from the outside the very secret of its clandestine inclusion or its internal exclusion.*⁸

The “crypt” thus denotes an inner split of the interior, which in this fashion ceases being a simple supplement of the exterior. It constitutes a concealed core of this topical structure, preserving certain features of alienness in relation to the interior, whose part it is. *Forum* is part of social space that may be, for example, delineated with ordinary cartographic methods, but the crypt, that external *dwór*, cannot be either mapped or discovered (even when magnified). All classical topologies, -graphies, -nymies come across an insurmountable obstacle, i.e. the sort that simply cannot be

overcome. This is “non-place” (*non-lieu*), which is not situated *somewhere* (here or there), but (I would be inclined to say that in the manner of *trompe l’œil* or *fata morgana*) it exists exclusively as *deformation*.

*

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török were interested primarily in the “cryptonymic” (a-semantic, “anasemic”) aspect of language that does not serve the transmission of meanings but their concealment. This conception attaches key significance to a reinterpretation of two conceits well known to psychoanalysis: introjection and incorporation, describing the relation between the outer world of the subject and surrounding reality.

The first was introduced into the language of psychoanalysis by Sándor Ferenczi in 1909 while defining introjection (i.e. “projection to the interior”) as a mechanism **enabling the extension onto the outer world of the originally auto-erotic involvement by including objects of the outer world into the Ego.**⁹ To put it differently, this time in the words of Freud: **Love is initially auto-narcissistic and subsequently encompasses objects incorporated into the expanded “Ego.”**¹⁰ Introjection was usually identified with incorporation (or it was perceived as an earlier stage of the same process), which in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915) Freud described as an economic response to the loss of an object of love, with which the Ego wishes to identify itself.¹¹ In the opinion of Abraham and Török, however, it is necessary to radically differentiate or even counter the two concepts since each brings totally different consequences. **I n t r o j e c t i o n** is to correspond to “normal” mourning, while **i n c o r p o r a t i o n** is the “illness of mourning”, which appears whenever introjection for some reason fails. Incorporation intends to *recover, in secret and through magic, an object*: it acts suddenly, fantasmically, sometimes in a hallucinatory manner, resembling plunder of sorts. It emerges, however, always along the borderline of introjection and pretends to be it so under the illusion of “ordinary” concealment that it may obliterate the trace of hiding the incorporated object.

In the process of **i n t r o j e c t i o n** I ultimately recognize and accept the actual death of the deceased (or the loss of a person, object or animal close to me) and do not identify it with my death; this is to say I still love him/it but only as a well-integrated particle of myself. Loss is compensated by recollection enhancing the Ego, i.e. memorisation, the assimilation of certain values or, as Freud put it, “identification”. According to Judith Butler: *This identification is not simply momentary or occasional, but becomes a new structure of identity; in effect, the other becomes part of the Ego through the permanent internalization of the other’s attributes.*¹² Essentially, it is even possible to define the Ego as a

system of numerous introjections attained slowly, during a whole lifetime, in a laborious process of successive internalisations, adaptations, and assimilations of assorted successively lost objects of love (and even in the process of an anticipation of “possible deaths”). Introjection is the reason why such partings (for the child the first loss is the withdrawing mother), even if painful, become bearable.¹³

Meanwhile, **i n c o r p o r a t i o n** is a neurotic obstacle for introjection, a response submerged in melancholy: the subject does not come to terms with the loss because the lost object fulfilled the function of a mediator with his inner world. He thus tries to fantasmically and magically dominate the object of desire since, enclosed in the crypt, who becomes a “living dead” or, to use an expression coined by Maria Török, *le cadaver exquis*. Derrida thus wrote:

The inhabitant of a crypt is always a living dead, a dead entity we are perfectly willing to keep alive, but as dead, one we are willing to keep as long as we keep it, within us, intact in any way save as living.

This is, Abraham and Török claimed, *refoulement conservateur*. Unspeakable mourning creates inside the subject *un caveau secret*. *Dans la crypte repose, vivant, reconstitué à partir de souvenirs de mots, d’images et d’affects, le contenu objectal de la perte, en tant que personne complète, avec sa propre topique, ainsi que les moments traumatiques - effectifs ou supposés - qui avaient rendu l’introjection impraticable.*¹⁴ The incorporated object becomes *included* by the cryptophoric subject in the domain of the subconscious, but at the same time, in the manner of a parasite or a hardened cyst, it is *excluded* from the system of introjections creating the Ego, the sphere of the activity of any sort of a “tribunal of conscience”, which would want to conduct coordination and resolve emergent contradictions. Derrida wrote that **this boundary** (between introjection and incorporation) **is necessary for the localisation of the crypt, since it encircles within the Ego** (the introjection system) **a cryptic enclave as allogenic incorporation space.**

The basically important fact is that **i n t r o j e c t i o n** speaks, names, enters into a dialogue, is rendered dialectic (symbolised) by its representations, and thus is subjected to ordinary psychoanalysis. Words replace that, which is lost – they represent lost presence. This is progressing, fragmentary substitution, clearly visible in the model-like sequence of the development of a child: from a mouth full of the mother’s breast, *via* the “empty mouth” to the subsequent cries and sobs and a mouth full of words replacing the mother’s absence. Introjection is, therefore, “satisfaction”, “communion” or the “world of the empty mouth” signifying self-understanding in the face of experienced lack.

This also holds true for mourning: words simultaneously denote the object of desire and shift it, perform the withdrawal of emotional involvement, the libido. Butler wrote: *This displacement from the original object is an essentially metaphorical activity in which words “figure” the absence and surpass it.*¹⁵

Meanwhile, incorporation appears at the moment when the “emptiness of the mouth” in vain summons introjective words; when it becomes impossible to replace the lost object with words (because this would reveal, for example, some sort of a shameful secret of this ideal). If the subject is incapable of self-satiation with words (metaphors) it embarks upon more radical activity: it absorbs the imagined *thing*, a fantasm, an object-fetish, isolating it far from the conscious part of the Ego, enclosing it in the crypt. Incorporation is, therefore, a de-metaphorisation of the word: by annulling its figurative meanings it preserves the loss of an object as radically unnamable, in this way guarding its secret. Words, however, which have been deprived of their metaphorical carrying capacity do not simply return to literal meaning; they continue to act, performing a fantasmatic destruction of the language itself and neutralising it as an instrument of presentableness.¹⁶

The crypt, declared Derrida, is *lieu de silence*. If incorporation is heard, then it is only to silence all suspicion or revert attention from the incorporated object. Incorporation thus differs from introjection primarily due to the use to which language is put or the possibility of deciphering it. Cryptonymy turns out to be to “cryptology”: burial in a crypt or, to put it differently, ciphering (*Crypter, c’est chiffrer* - Derrida).

That what is to be read is *un texte crypté* on the walls of the crypt, a cipher on a crypt. The wall, however, is not the first – the material of which it is built constitutes the text. The cipher makes it impossible to be deciphered on the surface of the wall.¹⁷

This is why an object “buried in a crypt” does not succumb to ordinary analysis. The reason does not lie in the fact that the crypt is localised somewhere very deep, but in the material out of which it had been built, i.e. language. The crypt is not a metaphor of ordinary unconsciousness (the interior of external consciousness) but “false” or “artificial” unconsciousness, which not only conceals something but also hides the very fact of concealment, i.e. creates a linguistic opposition to the efforts of the analyst. The crypt is linguistic space. It speaks just like the unconscious, imitating normal introjection, but in this way leaves that inner non-place, which is not subjected to any sort of symbolisation, excluded and untouched (*sauf*). It is, therefore, impossible to simply open it, break the seal

and read the name because this would be a transformation of the crypt into an ordinary grave, *le cadaver exquis* into a “dearly departed”, and incorporation into introjection; this is, after all, of what the set trap consists ...

*

In the conception devised by Abraham and Török the “crypt effect” has much in common with what these two researchers call: *l’effet de fantôme* – in both cases it signifies the psychic structures of incorporation, radically “decentralising”; in both instances the concept of the “secret” assumes special status. As in the case of the “living dead”, the phantom too cannot be integrated with the rest of the psychic life of the Ego – it puts up resistance and produces traumatic cracks. The situations, however, are not identical. The first was the outcome of failed mourning - the “alien” is incorporated into the crypt of the Ego; the second has a different etiology – the Ego encounters a “phantom” arriving from the unconsciousness of the “other”.

An excellent literary example of this difference is Shakespearean Hamlet. Without doubt, the problem of the Danish prince does not consist of the fact that he was unable to come to terms with the loss of his father and preserved him in his inner crypt as a “living dead” (subsequently enabling him to act secretly and as if autonomously). Shakespeare did not write about Hamlet’s crypt and his melancholy but, in the opinion of Abraham, about the secret, which the father took to his grave and which is now assumed by Hamlet. *It is the children’s or descendants’ lot to objectify these buried tombs through diverse species of ghosts.*¹⁸

*The appearance of the Father’s ghost at the start of the play objectifies the son’s awareness-unawareness [la science-nescience]. Awareness-unawareness of what? Of his own uneasiness due to a circumstance not to be doubted: the late King must have taken a secret with him to the grave. Does the ghost appear in order to lift the state of unawareness? If that were the case, the ghost’s objectification would have no more object than Hamlet’s own dubious “madness of doubt”. A ghost returns to haunt with the intent of lying; its would-be “revelations” are false by nature.*¹⁹

This is a hypothesis that for four centuries has been ignored by the spectators and critics of *Hamlet*: the “secret” disclosed by the ghost of old Hamlet containing the injunction to seek revenge is a trap. Actually, it conceals yet another, true secret of the shame borne by the father about which nothing can be said and of which the son is unaware but which leaves behind a certain trace. This is why the *sui generis* psychoanalytical investigation conducted by the young Hamlet, summed up in a theatrical reconstruction-repetition

based on the confession of the ghost, is doomed to fail. The revealed “truth” only calms that unease of ignorance, whose concretisation is the appearance of the Ghost.

The phantom, according to the interpretation proposed by Abraham and Török, is a phenomenon existing in a trans-generational dimension (one could say: a transsexual one, since it resembles a quotation although accepted together with the error or gap contained in the original); it consists of the presence in the living Ego of a deceased ancestor, albeit as a carrier of his trauma; the Ego is unaware of this presence despite the fact that it is the cause of his disturbances. Naturally, this has nothing in common with spiritualism. *It is a fact that the phantom, whatever its form, is nothing but the invention of the living. Yes, an invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations the gap [lacune], the concealment of some part of a loved one's life produced in us... Consequently, what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others.*²⁰

The “phantom effect” thus introduces an even more radical” heterogeneity, because it assumed a “heterocryptical” topos that does not concern the burial of an alien object in one's crypt but the encounter of the Ego and an object arriving from the crypt of another unconsciousness (*the corpse buried in the other*). Both “my” crypt, the effect of incorporation and the absorption of an alien object, which I do not want to lose, and the Phantom haunting me set into motion strategies drawing attention away from their secret. The law of the phantom obligates to remain ignorant.

The phantom is a formation of the unconscious, which was never conscious and thus fulfils a function different than repression; nonetheless, it returns periodically and resembles a trauma that never actually took place. According to Abraham, it *works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's mental topography*. Abraham mentioned: (...) *by their gratuitousness in relation to the subject they create the impression of surrealistic flights of fancy or of oulipo-like verbal feats*. This is why the phantom is never experienced by the subject as something real, and in the course of analysis can only *give rise to constructions with all their attendant uncertainties*.²¹ This construction is difficult because the phantom resists “interpretation”, words capable of integrating themselves with the subconscious, i.e. libidinal introjection. The words, with whose assistance the phantom returns, i.e. those to which the child once paid attention when one of the parents uttered them, do not constitute a source of the phantom's statement, but an *interval* in that, which is tellable. This interval, accepted by the subject (since, as we have said, it is not the effect of its repression) and blocking the path towards introjec-

tion, becomes for him the same sort of a wound that it was for his ancestor.

Briefly, if the phantom haunting the Ego in some way makes its presence known then it does so not to confess the sins encumbering his heart or to get rid of a traumatic (horrible and possibly shameful) secret, but on the contrary, in order to “seal” it (to preserve this “skeleton in the cupboard”, his silence, the gap in the topography of his subjectivity). This is also **why the phantom in folk beliefs only objectifies the metaphor, active in the subconscious, of burying a shameful fact in an object**.²² It is thus necessary to treat with a great dose of suspicion the truthfulness of ghosts, including those haunting us in stories: they come not only to make it possible for the living to learn about the secret concealed in the grave but, on the contrary, by proposing false secrets to preserve it only as the unutterable.

*

Introjection appears to be a good model of the text/image subjected to classical interpretation (analysis), striving towards revealing *c o n c e l e d* meanings – we recognise then that the work has been constructed in accordance with the classical logic of the symbol, and as a consequence we seek the missing (co-)symbolic supplement, i.e. strive towards the recreation of the “pre-symbolic”, “homogeneous” and “metaphorical” completeness of meaning. Is a text/image concealing a crypt, and inside the latter – “endocryptic life”, an incorporated cadaver (and even more so a phantom), possible?²³ Naturally, it is unnecessary to recall that no text or image is a neurotic patient of Dr Freud (even the author does not have to play this part - we are not dealing with psycho-biographies). In this case, the “crypt” is a “mere metaphor” (in addition, secondary in relation to the psychoanalytical metaphor). But this is a productive metaphor if we include psychoanalytical terminology into the interpretation procedure so as to diagnose “the illness”, which would summarise the meaning of the analysed text; on the contrary, the purpose should involve rather opening the text than reducing its possible meanings.²⁴

Naturally, there comes to mind the question: how to differentiate the cryptophoric (“cryptomimetic”) text from the same classical story (Abraham and Török: **deprived of what would the Wolf Man not be the Wolf Man but a classic patient?**)²⁵ One could formulate this doubt slightly differently: since the object encoded in the crypt (*encrypté*) is radically illegible and each attempt at deciphering his “name” means the necessity of falling into a cleverly devised trap, then is incorporation a concept possessing any sort of operational usefulness?²⁶ The task we are facing does not consist of forcing the text to act in the manner of an Egyptian mummy from a popular joke

and “confess” its real name; on the contrary, we are concerned with taking into account this uncertainty, the “cracks” in the meaning, the retention of the text in its “strangeness” and significant nonsense. The model of the “cryptophoric” text/image presupposes (differently than the model, which could be called “semiophoric”) an essential compilation of its “topical structure”, which as a consequence complicates the cognitive structure: the work resists classical questions about the “topic”, “message” and “sense”. We would be dealing with an image that not only conceals meaning (as an “ordinary” symbol) but also intermingles traces - the interpreted traces lose their cognitive credibility (mimetic value).

The “crypt” (as a conception that essentially expands the metaphoric of our understanding both of literature and the visual arts) is a premise making it possible to overcome a temptation typical for classical interpretation, namely, to replace the radical “hermeneutics” of the image (the absolute and irreducible²⁷ inaccessibility of its contents) with “hermeneutics” offering hope for penetrating the interior in order to decipher the text/image in a way resembling the one in which, for instance, archaeologists opened the Copernicus crypt in Frombork, i.e. in order to identify the deceased and prepare something resembling a definite death certificate (does this activity not bear the marks of some sort of enlightened exorcism?). As Professor Jerzy Gąssowski (also my professor when I was a student of archaeology), who conducted this task, said in a newspaper interview:

The research started with disinfecting the entry to the crypt. The latter had been closed several decades ago and its disinfection was indispensable so as not to expose scientists entering it to any sort of danger.

If our intention is penetration of “cryptophoric” books, paintings or films, then archaeological methods applied to neutralise a similar risk - prepared for scientists by a literary/painterly Copernicus or Tutankhamen – are pointless since it is impossible to differentiate the “crypt” from its “effect”, the danger created by it from its valuable contents sought by us, namely, the cadaver-death. The only real thing is precisely that hidden activity of the “curse” or the “microbes” breeding in the anasemic environment (an exemplary illustration of this paradox are the studies carried out by William of Baskerville on the second book of Aristotle’s *Poetics* dealing with comedy – as we know, it was dangerous both owing to its contents and the poison protecting access to it and covering the pages of the only existing copy). It is the deadly resistance put up by the crypt (Derrida: *la résistance interne du caveau*), its resilient matter or irremovable frame that could prove to be the real stake in this research game, the

concealed name, the sought after Thing (*La Chose*). **That what is to be read is un texte crypté on the walls of the crypt, a cipher on a crypt. The wall, however, is not the first – the material of which it is built constitutes the text. The cipher makes it impossible to be deciphered on the surface of the wall.**²⁸

Derrida radicalised both the “crypt effect” and the “phantoms”. In accordance with the conception proposed by Abraham if ghosts lie and cheat then they should be subjected to suitable exorcisms, reintroducing their secret into the order of things (even if this is an extremely difficult task). For Derrida, however, incorporation, the crypt and the phantom cease being a symptom of psycho-pathology; in the same way, the status of the secret concealed in the crypt or brought by the phantom haunting the subject also changes. There is no way to tame it, domesticate it in the stable domain of ontology or express it in the language of knowledge (on the wall of the crypt). All operations serving its deciphering (the preparation of the crypt for research) serve the process of concealing an even greater mystery, namely, that there is no (other) mystery (to be discovered as a primeval object to be restored to knowledge). The only real thing is “endocryptic identification”, i.e. irreducible knowledge-non-knowledge, and endless construction work.²⁹

*

In order to identify the valuable cadaver it is necessary to localise its crypt; for this purpose we must identify the boundary between introjection and incorporation. This border, however, always appears at the end of introjection, similar to it although always slightly further, accessible not only as *that* word but merely as its rhyme, deformation, shadow, trace of a trace... This is precisely the death (lurking in the crypt) of the image.

Endnotes

- ¹ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *Cryptonymie. Le verbier de l'homme aux loups*, Paris: Flammarion 1976, p. 230.
- ² N. Abraham, *L'unité duelle et le fantôme*, in: Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *L'Écorce et le noyau*, Flammarion: Paris 1978, p. 394 [emphasis - W. M.]. I explain the concept of introjection slightly further on.
- ³ Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, op. cit., p. 230.
- ⁴ Their studies from the 1960s and 1970s were collected in: *L'Écorce et le noyau*, supplemented by: *Cryptonymie*, a “cryptonymic” reinterpretation of the famous case of the Wolf Man. Sándor Ferenczi lived in 1873-1933; Nicolas Abraham – in 1919-1975; Maria Torok – in 1926-1998.
- ⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Fors: les mots anglais de Nicolas Abraham et Maria Torok*, in: Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, op. cit., pp. 9-73.
- ⁶ See also, i.a. Derrida: *O gramatologii* (Warszawa 1999), *Marginesy filozofii* (Warszawa 2002), *La dissemination* (Paris 1972), *Chora* (Warszawa 1999), *Prawda w malar-*

- stwie (Gdańsk 2003), *Survivre* and *La loi du genre*, in: *Parages* (Paris 1986).
- 7 Barbara Johnson translated *for* into the English simply as *forum*; one should keep in mind, however, that the two words (*for* and *forum*) appear together in Derrida's text and have a different meaning (see: Derrida, *Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok*, transl. Barbara Johnson, in: N. Abraham and M. Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1986, pp. XI-XLVIII).
- 8 Derrida, *Fors*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
- 9 I quote after: M. Torok, *Maladie du deuil et fantasme du cadavre exquis*, in: *L'Écorce...*, op. cit., p. 235.
- 10 S. Freud, *Popędy i ich losy*, in: *Psychologia nieświadomości*, transl. R. Reszke, KR: Warszawa 2007, p. 74 (text from 1915).
- 11 Sigmund Freud, *Żaloba i melancholia*, in: idem, *Psychologia nieświadomości*, op. cit., pp. 147-159, see: p. 152. Cf. idem, i.a. *Psychologia zbiorowości*, where "introjection" is used in reference to melancholy (transl. R. Reszke, in: *Pisma społeczne*, KR: Warszawa 1998, p. 89); *Popędy i ich losy* (in: *Psychologia nieświadomości*, op. cit., p. 72); „Ja” i „to” (ibid., p. 235 sqq.).
- 12 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York 1990, p. 58.
- 13 See: Maria Yassa, *Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok – The inner crypt*, "Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review" 25, 2/2002, p. 7.
- 14 Abraham and Torok, *Deuil ou mélancolie. Introjecter – incorporer*, in: *L'Écorce...*, op. cit., p. 266.
- 15 Butler, op. cit. p. 68.
- 16 See: Abraham and Torok, *Deuil ou mélancolie*, op. cit., p. 267.
- 17 Derrida, *Fors*, op. cit., p. 53.
- 18 Nicolas Abraham, *Notules*, in: *L'Écorce et le noyau*, op. cit., p. 427. See also: Derrida, *Fors*, op. cit., note on p. 42.
- 19 Abraham, *Le fantôme d'Hamlet*, in: *L'Écorce...*, op. cit., p. 449.
- 20 Abraham, *Notules*, op. cit., p. 427. See also: Colin Davis, *Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms*, "French Studies" 59,3/2005, pp. 373-379.
- 21 Abraham, *Notules*, pp. 449-50. See also: Torok, *Histoire de peur. Le symptôme phobique: retour du refoulé ou retour du fantôme?*, in: *L'Écorce...*, op. cit., p. 439.
- 22 Abraham, *Notules*, p. 427. The conception proposed by Abraham and Torok encouraged researches studying literature to seek in literary texts such deceitful phantoms trying to conceal awkward family secrets unconsciously inherited by authors or narrators. Several examples were discussed by Colin Davis, op. cit. Here, however, this motif appears to be less essential.
- 23 Introjection and incorporation are concepts that, naturally, can be used (even without leaving the sphere of the psychoanalytical discourse) for describing the relation between the recipient and the work - if we recognize the "patient" experiencing loss to be a reader, and a book, a film or a painting to be the lost object (suffice to recall the sorrow we experience each time when at the end of a favourite book were are forced to say farewell to its protagonists). In a normal situation, therefore, I accept the fact that the story has come to an end and its fictitious characters "really" do not exist; nonetheless, "I" can "symbolically" identify with them and accept the "lesson" taught by the work and thus enhance and expand my inner world. Sometimes, however, there appears a fantasmatic wish on the part of the subject to absorb, take over and keep this "object of desire", to preserve it in the permanent shape of "the living dead" – outside the entire system of introjection and beyond the supervision of *tribunal de la conscience* (this situation is excellently exemplified by Annie Wilkes, the lead protagonist of *Misery*, a novel by Stephen King and a motion picture by Rob Reiner (1990) – an obsessive reader of romantic novels about Misery Chastaine, Annie imprisons their author so as to make it impossible for him to "kill off" her favourite character. In another version, the heart of the matter would involve "metalepsy" described by Gérard Genette, in this case obliterating the boundary between the inner world of the text and the empirical world).
- 24 See: Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, *Semiotics and Art History*, "Art Bulletin" 73,2/1991, p. 197.
- 25 Abraham and Torok, *Cryptonymie*, op. cit., p. 232. The term: *cryptomimesis* was proposed by Jodey Castricano in the book: *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing*, McGill-Queen's University Press: Montréal: 2001.
- 26 This question was posed by Eugenio Donato in: *Qui Signe 'Flaubert'?*, "MLN" 98, 4/1983, p. 591.
- 27 See: Umberto Eco, *Imię róży*, transl. Adam Szymanowski, PIW: Warszawa 1996.
- 28 Derrida, *Fors*, p. 53, emphasis – W. M. Let us recall upon this occasion that according to Freud Nicholas Copernicus decided to decentralize man's cosmological place in the universe (Sigmund Freud, *Eine Schwierigkeit der Psychoanalyse*, 1917).
- 29 Derrida expanded his science about phantoms and "hauntology" comprehended as "different ontology" – similarly as reflections about the Ghost in *Hamlet* – in: *Spectres de Marx: l'état de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*, Galilée: Paris 1993. More on this topic in my book: *Piękna jako bestia* (in print); the presented text is an abbreviated and altered fragment.

Transgression and Tragedy, Laughter versus Death¹

Within cyberspace one can travel against the current of time. It makes no difference that several years have passed since this day in September 2009. On the Internet it remains present and at any given moment we may take a trip to that Scottish cemetery to take a look at a British soldier weeping at a funeral of his brother-in-arms killed in Afghanistan. The newspaper photographs show mourners dressed in black among gravestones. Only one young man, the closest friend of the deceased, is wearing an outrageous summer mini-dress: bright yellow in colour, with a low neckline, and as if this was not enough he is also sporting pink knee socks. A reader learns about a promise made on the battlefield – if one of them were to die then the other would dress in this way for the funeral. Those present appear to respect his behaviour – after all, they are British and no one demonstrates surprise, let alone mirth, although the young man was greeted with applause.²

Over a hundred English and Polish Internet commentaries provide a complex social commentary to this highly unusual behaviour. The majority of Internet users express approval for the gesture of friendship: the British comments used the word *respect*, the same as the Polish: *szacun*, a counterpart favoured by the young mostly in its abridged form); here and there a homoerotic insinuation may emerge or someone foolishly ridicules a supposed misunderstanding (i.e. the Scot had in mind that his friend should put on a traditional kilt), another sums up the event with the word: *lans* (to launch oneself), and yet another finds a certain dose of comedy in the whole situation.

When reading those opinions an ethnologist has a chance, without even leaving home, to carry on ethnographic fieldwork; moreover, he is outright invited to provide suitable explanations. Some commentators evidently lack a clue on how to decipher the enigmatic situation and require its rationalisation. They express their *r e s p e c t* for a friend's loyalty but do not comprehend the *d i s r e s p e c t* through which it is expressed. Someone questions the very possibil-

ity of understanding such behaviour: *Generally speaking, I think that all those comments (including mine) are pointless and devoid of sense. Another opinion puts the blame on the editors of "Gazeta Wyborcza" for the absence of an authoritative explanation: We know nothing. They promised each other a funeral with a dress but we do not know whether it was to be of a subtle colour or whether they specially arranged unsuitable colours. The inappropriate character of the colour of his dress and socks is so striking that I am surprised that Gazeta Wybiórcza [a mock-spelling] published it without a more objective commentary, clarifying the facts.*³

Even "The Times" did not manage to meet such expectations and offered only a cut and dry account.

2.

Hence, if not the journalist then the anthropologist should embark upon an explanation of the cultural logic of this episode, hoping that he might understand it better – after all, we really comprehend something only when we have to explain it in a discursive mode, not just being content with a vague feeling of grasping it. May he only remember that being a scholar does not absolve him from fallacies and interpretation predicaments similar to those troubling other readers. After all, we are dealing here with fundamental existential dilemmas, for whose solution the academy does not have a patent.

Secondly, an even more important disclaimer: the described behaviour does not possess the features of a custom, an accepted cultural praxis, which the ethnologist could routinely explain against the backdrop of local convictions or beliefs, the rules of the language of a given culture, a search for analogies of similar ritual conduct, etc. This was, after all, an occasional individual act; moreover, it was an antinormative one. Even if in our shared and intuitive reception such "anti-behaviour" has some sort of enigmatic meaning, a concealed symbolic content, its communicative dimension was neither foreseen nor taken into account by our protagonist, or at least nothing is known about it. Will we, therefore, ascribe to him intentions that he did not harbour and assume the presence of reasons that he probably did not pursue? Obviously, a scholar must avoid interpretations-imputations, i.e. explanations that arbitrarily ascribe to the acting subject his own comprehension of (symbolic) behaviour and motives of activity. The ethnologist cannot perform the part of a psychologist nor does he wish to remain satisfied with psychological explanations, because he hopes to attain a rewarding cultural explanation. In other words, will he be forced to create a hypostasis (or fiction) of some sort of a supra-individual "symbolic sub-consciousness" that would justify the search for analogies between the examined individual behaviour and its assorted cultural analogies? How else can we



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respond to the reader's need for understanding, how to assist the spectator in discovering the human significance of an illegible albeit meaningful act?

A symbol is not some sort of a simple entry to be deciphered in a pocket dictionary. According to the philosopher, the symbol provides food for thought. That what it offers a concrete recipient, and the sort of reflections it inspires, depends on the cultural outfitting of that recipient, the expanse of his sphere of references to which he will match symbolic activity so as to create his own version of its sense against a more complete background.

Accordingly, I propose precisely this role of a researcher – by no means an interpreter offering ready-made answers but a supplier of suitable contexts. He is compelled to build a set of similar phenomena, and having placed every new case in an appropriate place and by referring to them he may propose a comprehension of its meaning. A thus perceived researcher will not make an announcement about meaning but rather provide elements of cultural competence necessary for an independent reception of a symbolic message.

At the onset, let us divide the whole event into two stages and add something obvious: the funeral grotesque at the cemetery was the consequence of an earlier act that we may describe as “adjuration of the improbable”. The promise given by two brothers-in-arms was a *sui generis* bet made with fate: THAT will certainly never take place, you shall not die just as I, a

British soldier, will never have to come to your funeral dressed like that. But since it did happen

At this point, I interrupt my reflections so as to add a single thing before act two starts: at the time of making this arrangement, i.e. in a situation of wartime stress, it possessed a certain psychological value – a comical relief effect helpful in a confrontation with omnipresent threat. After all, the image of “a man dressed as woman” is a fundamental form of popular humour, the simplest way of producing soothing laughter next only to the “man slips on a banana peel” motif.

We do not know whether the young soldiers intentionally referred to some sort of cultural models and imagery. Their joke was certainly aimed against death lurking all around – it excluded it or at the very least deprived it of its sting by immersing the menace in an atmosphere of the absurd.

An English commentary adds:

I can imagine those two pals, drunk in a bar and joking: “Look, if one of us gets killed then the other will have to wear a dress to the funeral, so we can't get e shot because we do not want to put on this f...cking dress and wear it in public”. I bet when one of them left for a mission the other always said: “Don't do anything to make me wear that dress”, in other words, this was their version of: “don't get killed”. They must have made this joke a lot. It was their way of making light of the threat.

The same holds true for the Polish comment: *In my opinion this bet was a declaration of sorts: "Listen, pal, we're at war, things are tough, but you can't die because otherwise I shall come to your funeral in a garish frock".*⁴

And now, when THAT did happen after all The grotesque is transferred into the public space of the cemetery and within this altered context it assumes different meanings. It not only fulfils a promise - it is a provocation, impropriety, and disrespect since this is the way the reversal of suitable gender roles demonstrated for all the world to see should be comprehended. At the same time, note that the reversal in question was accentuated in a special, exaggerated way - one is tempted to use the slang word: *draczny* (wacky), and thus it too should be deciphered.

3.

A man in a woman's dress - this must make an impression. We all agree that it might be amusing only during a carnival, in a comedy or a cabaret, but outside this context it appears to be rather tragic (there is no need to recall an embarrassing and by no means funny story that took place a year ago and involved a certain Polish political-media authority).⁵ In order to fully understand our case consider, to begin with, the simplest associations that are always the first to appear and offer something different than an explanation. After all, it does not suffice to reduce the whole episode to the otherwise meaningful tradition of British eccentricity, although its records include the case of a lord who 150 years ago expanded the ancient praxis of funeral reversals to such a degree that he wished to be buried upside down, vertically, and on a horse, a feat that obviously involved considerable logistic problems. He acted in this way convinced that just as death is the reversal of life so resurrection will consist of turning the world upside down (here Jonathan Swift and his *Gulliver's Travels* seem to be to blame: the same conviction was, after all, harboured by the residents of the land of Lilliput; for details see: Wasilewski 1987, p. 180).

In this manner, we find ourselves in the first *cul de sac* of an uncertain interpretation: the attractive analogy between cross-dressing, i.e. exchanging clothes, and assorted forms of behaviour reversed in various cultures. Inversion - a physical reversal, applied not only in the case of clothes but also different ritual props and manners of performing ritual gestures, comprises, after all, standard symbolic activity for the sake of expressing or feigning the state of death envisaged as the opposite of life. It was applied probably in all traditional cultures at different stages of burial, from watching over the corpse to the end of mourning, in acts of remembering the deceased and visions of the netherworld as a land of reversed spatial order. Regardless whether this denotes the mourners wearing



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clothes inside out, arranging utensils upside down and mirrors back to front, or performing ritual acts with the left hand - all are a unanimous symbolic system serving the expression/communication of the state of death.

Reversal often assumes forms exceeding spatial inversion and encompasses even the category of gender by exchanging attire. Ethnological studies inform that mourners resorted to reversal; such reports mentioned men putting on women's clothes more frequently than *vice versa*, but it would be difficult to find pertinent statistics (several inevitably Frazer-like examples are cited by Nola 1995, pp. 194-195).

Gender reversal perceived from this perspective would thus signify a reversal of the order of life applied for expressing the emergent state of death. Each reversal takes on the features of transgression in connection with sexual issues, strongly regulated by norms or outright surrounded with taboo. In all social systems such behaviour is immediately assessed as transgression or subversion. On the margin, let us note that it is for this reason that it approaches the comic; after all, humour consists of undermining (in a non-threatening and far from serious manner) some sort of reality. Transgressions in the domain of sex can have far-reaching consequences.

4.

At Hawaii the death of a chief was marked by violent manifestations of mourning. The participants wore their loincloths around their neck instead of loins. This vestimentary inversion of high and low was accompanied by (and no doubt also signified) sexual license.

The great Claude Lévi-Strauss, from whose *The Savage Mind* (1969, p. 216) I chose the above quotation, thus merely observed that violation-inversion served the purpose of communication about the state

of death by reversing the up and the down as elementary values; in local culture their permanent place in daily life is rigorously observed in accordance with the local admonition: *What belongs above should stay above and what belongs below should stay below* (*Ko luna, no luna no ia; Ko lalo no lalo no ia*)” (p. 217).

Ko luna, no luna... and everything is clear: death, the antithesis of life, is expressed in symbolical language by means of inversions - spatial and others. Nonetheless, we are compelled to ask about the “meaning” of the sexual license and whether it merely “means” something. After all, we are dealing with a violation of daily rigours and fundamental taboos, with transgression, which at that particular moment is permissible but still possesses the character of a misdemeanour.

May the reader forgive me for repeating in this, after all, funeral context, an old joke, an anthropological variant of a known American formula, in which assorted sciences propose a wise answer to a simple question: “Why did the chicken cross the street?”. Years ago, when anthropology defined culture as a system of signs and when dominating comprehension used the categories of communication, academic semioticians responded: “In order to communicate that it wants to cross to the other side ...”. Told by

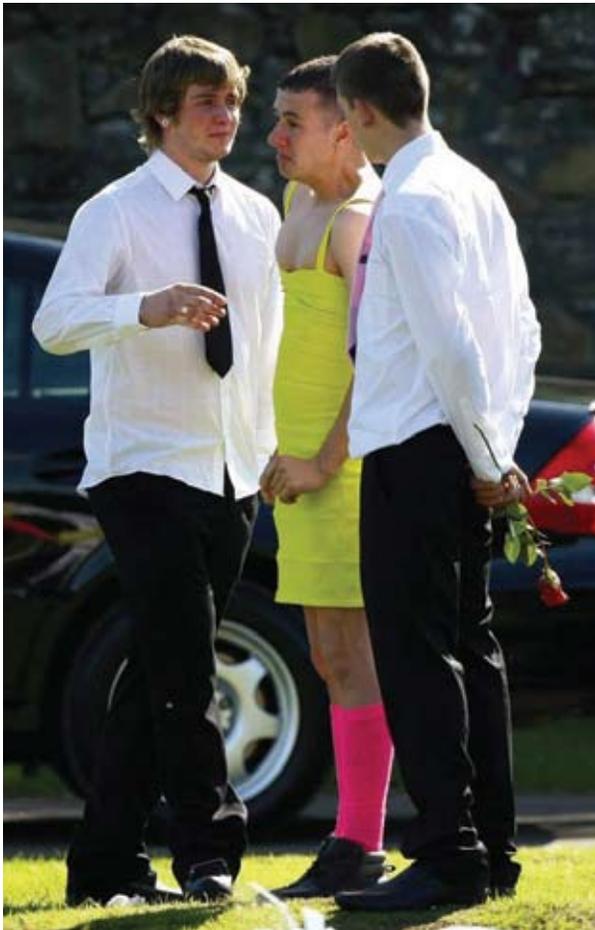


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semioticians, this joke from Bloomington is obviously self-ironic, because the meaning of each activity, also that of a sign or one possessing a sign aspect, is not exclusively communicative – it is also operational and causal. Symbols do not serve the purpose of reading – they create a situation even if they must be deciphered by the recipients. Although such signs comprise whole abstract systems whose disentanglement – in analyses of texts and symbolic behaviour – is sheer pleasure for an adept dealing with symbolic anthropology, they still serve some sort of an objective and possess an instrumental, practical, and social value.

Instead of deciphering inverted behaviour as a “symbolic communiqué about death” perhaps it would be correct to recognise that the death of a chieftain actually *e x i s t s* as (or rather *b e c o m e s* precisely *via* such behaviour) a period of anarchy and social disorder, when instincts come to the fore and a-social and drive-oriented behaviour is permitted.

Ethnographic material from exotic cultures, European antiquity, and pre-modern times confirms such an interpretation. Sources inform about customary and radical archaic activity: the devastation of homes sanctioned by tradition, group thefts or outright plunder, rituals of rebellion, and more or less ritualised violence – all this was part of the order of the day not only on the islands of the Pacific but even in Europe during the time of mourning for rulers, popes, and bishops (Nola 1995, pp. 204-208).

It would be short-sighted to explain these practices by referring to circumstances in which licensed anarchy appeared in periods of a temporary lack of authorities and was to make use of this absence and, simultaneously, to express or communicate it. Such debauchery was recorded by ethnographers also in the case of burials not solely of chieftains and commanders – a fact that forces to consider a different explanation. Within this content a reference to the carnival may not sound like the best suggestion, even in the wide meaning given by Mikhail Bakhtin, although one certainly may use the terms “anti-behaviour” or “ritual debauchery”, accepted in ethnology. In reference to behaviour at funerals we come across both phenomena in the not so distant past and in regions quite close to us.

Stanisław Vincenz described his Hutsuls as they *earnestly played the games prescribed by custom right next to the deceased. First, they played żużukało [“droning”] with such great zeal that the cottage shook; heard from afar it resembled the sound of an organ. They also pretended to be a mill, and boys under a bench made noise imitating the rattle of a real mill. Just as noisy was the make-belief bargaining of a famer and Jewish traders, and even more clamorous - brawls involving Jews, as is customary in this game. [...] Tides of powerful laughter came from the cottage over and over again.*

Not a single game was forgotten. A magpie squeaked and a goat nibbled the girls, an Armenian galloped inside the cottage on a frisky horse, making the windowpanes rattle, women assaulted a beggar, while a jealous old woman beat their sheepskin coats producing noise as loud as pistol shots. [...] In this Christian way they celebrated watching over the body (1980, pp. 99-100).

Zuzukanie and loud laughter were by no means all. Vincenz monumentalised the Hutsuls and his descriptions are devoid of elements of open obscenities, ludic transgression, and even outright brutality among the Eastern and Southern Slavs documented by ethnographers. These elements were mentioned by the classic of empiric research into folk culture, Pierre Bogatyrev (Bogatyrev 1926), as well as several other researchers. Their interpretations mention: *ritual merrymaking at the funeral and the wake, including assorted jokes concerning the deceased* (Uspienski 1998, p. 84; *ibid.* older literature on the subject).

What would have been the purpose of such merriment? It was probably treated as an antidote against death, a method for compensating the deficit of life forces and extracting the community from depression and apathy. For an author looking from a semiotic point of view a more correct perspective would entail placing such acts within the widest context and referring them to a general dichotomous model of the world.

Having compared assorted behaviour, including the one demonstrated by the *yurodivy* - "the fools of God", Boris Uspienski, an eminent expert on the culture of Old Rus', supplemented the last quotation with the following, probably somewhat incomplete commentary: *Apparently, it was assumed that in the other world this type of behaviour would change into its opposite.*

In other words, all sorts of anti-behaviour inversions, even those focused on fun, are to be explained by referring to visions of inversed netherworlds. The meaning of burial jokes was to consist of the fact that they were deciphered "on the other side" as an expression of respect. In this fashion, disrespect would change into respect, performing a turnabout of 180 degrees, the same as the one in which life becomes death.

I am unable to assess the above conclusion otherwise than in categories of naive literalness. Acting as a wall it closes the interpretation *cul de sac* along which it was worth walking, although only for a certain time. Transgression is much too serious for a community to perceive it solely as abstract, conceptual markers in a purely intellectual operation of inversion. When we deal with spontaneous behavioural dissipation all explanations claiming that it is a symbolic derivative of speculative vision simply sound artificial; it is not worth treating powerful social violation and ethical subversion as behaviour secondary *vis a vis* a text

(beliefs, visions) about reversed netherworlds, even if at different times this image possesses the significant force of a system modelling ritual behaviour (e.g. the above-mentioned spatial inversions). In such an elucidation the researcher rather associates than proves: he satisfies his need for order and logic in material rather than establishing authentic profound relations essential for its comprehension.

5.

Take a closer look to those transgressions, if we wish to take the trouble of interpreting them. The ethnographic penetrations of Transcarpathian Ukrainian villages carried out in recent years by my colleagues from the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at Warsaw University (the Bojko region examined by Tadeusz Baraniuk and a group of students) ⁶ furnished information about the retention of practices described by Bogatyrev more than a decade ago and sporadically occurring probably even today. They indicate the durability of two particularly transgressive motifs.

First, the sexual element: in the course of a group watch over the deceased those present imitate sexual intercourse involving couples with intertwined legs and performed in all possible age combinations (man-woman, man-girl, woman-boy, boy-girl); girls also start kissing the boys, i.e. once again contrary to the social norm. Together with lesser erotic provocations (an old man accosted by young women, and girls by a goat) this is an extensive range of transgression against mores, especially considering the unusual occasion.



Photo: Jeff J. Mitchell/Getty Images – after: Internet sources cited in note 2

Second, the frequency and intensity of assault in games of skill – it is said, with some embarrassment, that the loser was beaten so hard than he was almost killed. We may interpret this as a high degree of aggression present in fun, and thus once again as transgression. Let us add the noisemaking strongly accentuated in descriptions, here appearing as the mildest form of violating order.

Can all this only “symbolize”, “denote” or “communicate” the state of death? Or, on the contrary, is it supposed to balance the dramatic situation and turn it towards life? Why, then, does it take place already at the time of the watch over the dead and not after the burial?

Asking the Bojko performers and participants of the events about their reasons and motivations is rather futile. Today, they appear to be, and sometimes are embarrassed. Any sort of offered explanation seems to be distinctly secondary: the prohibition to fall asleep during the watch, to which they referred and motivated with magic-religious reasons, would not, after all, call for such drastic entertainment.

Looking from a comparative viewpoint one could find burial excesses much further going than those committed by the Hutsul or Bojko peoples.

The following statements should not be treated as an attempt at shocking the reader with exotica, which, to make matters worse, is taken out of its context and thus is not interpreted in a suitably integral fashion – recall the Indian potlatch, which involved destroying the entire property of the deceased, or games of chance – once again played next to the corpse – when all the livestock was lost and the widow bedded the last animal, a pig or a ram, and *caressed it like her husband* (Jensen 1960, p. 73; this quotation was borrowed from Karsten describing the Indians of Ecuador).

Ignoring all possible additional meanings, not revealed in an extractive approach, it would be difficult to find a more powerful example of posthumous practices as a violation of the basic taboo: this one is simply atrocious. The cited example demonstrated that reducing posthumous transgressions to an intention of anarchic “making use of an opportunity” is useless. If we concur that such extreme behaviour can become a component of burial customs precisely owing to their transgressive character then this is obviously because they somehow correspond to the unusual nature of death *vis a vis* the order of life. “Somehow” – this means: how? After all, it is impossible to maintain that they only “express” it *via* symbolic operations – inversion, the reversal of order, the violation of decency. It could be rather that they evoke its horror and scandalousness. Quite possibly, although they operate with formally similar acts, their meaning is totally contradictory: are they supposed to protest against death and sometimes ridicule and challenge it?

It should be kept in mind that only in analytical-interpretation bookkeeping we must separately decipher and record such contradictory senses as, in our case, the expression of death and, at the same time, its negation and undermining. In culture they function inseparably: it is the economy of the symbol, its “referential economising”, not to mention the variability of cultural texts and contexts that go back to prehistory, that is the reason why the same act may express various and even contradictory intentions. Incursion and disorder may both articulate and overcome death. Forms of culture did not come into being in order to smoothly enter our academic interpretation compartments.

6.

Back to the Scottish cemetery. As I mentioned, the female costume of the soldier features a striking exaggeration: we are dealing not only with the keeping of a promise but with some sort of excessive demonstration. There appears something that could be colloquially described as wacky, an intentional provocation, also of the aesthetic kind. The “inappropriate colours” that irritated the commentators so much, those childish knee socks as an accessory – the very act of their selection and the preparation of the attire in this most grating version must have been accompanied by intending to attain maximum enhancement of the absurd. Everything appeared to signal: “don’t take this literally”, “I’m not pretending to be a woman – I’m pretending to pretend in order to express something else”.

At this point one could apply such semiotic formulae as “quotation mark expressions” or, in the language of the Russian formalists: *ostranieniye*, or the Brechtian

Verfremdungseffekt. I, however, opt for “wackiness”, because the soldier did this for fun, for show. Why? Only within the context of the above-cited ethnographic material could we hazard the following assumption: he did so in order to go the whole way in expressing his protest, to put on a wacky show for the whole world to see. After all, there has to be a way of reacting against the absurdity of death, and this can be achieved only with equally absurd activity. The *scandalum* of death can be exceeded or repulsed exclusively by means of the scandal of one’s indecency.

Or could it be that this solitary soldier resembled yet another protagonist demonstrating a similar form of anti-behaviour – the mentioned Old Russian “God’s fool”, the *yurodivy*? He too behaved scandalously in the face of the sacred: he threw stones at a church and genuflected in front of a tavern. In a polemic with explanations of such acts as a parody Uspienski wrote correctly that conduct of this sort was a form of indicating the devilish sinfulness of the world: for the

yurodivy the world ceased being the work of God and became a world reversed by the devil, and this is why one should behave *à rebours*. One could say that in his individual episodic behaviour man can allow himself to disagree, to dramatically protest against the painfulness of the world, in contrast to ritualised social acts compelled to accentuate normalcy and inevitability (even death) in order to offer comfort or the process of coming to terms. This is why the anthropologist can decipher the symbolic content of funeral transgression in different ways: in an individual case he should perceive in it depravation and rebellion, and in a group act – the extension of the state of death, its acceptance and overcoming. Such strictly ritual behaviour may be described as “ridiculing death” (see: *Todesverlachen*, e.g. Wolff 2009; “ridiculing the world” in: Tadeusz Baraniuk, 1999). In the case of our point of departure it would be difficult to speak about laughter, although the applied form brings to mind derision. Reversal and undermining, the grotesque and the unsuitable, all are a cry of protest against the ontical absurdity of death, which itself is the most terrible transgression. If joking sometimes possesses a vector precisely and personally directed against someone then in this instance we know who this was joke aimed at with all its force: this is a joke directed against death.⁷

One last glance at the young man in the florescent dress, kneeling and sobbing next to his friend’s grave, and we shall no longer have any doubts that his clothes say: “Here I am at Your funeral and demonstrate with my behaviour that Your death is totally absurd and unacceptable and that I too act in a manner as absurd and unsuitable as possible”.

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Endnotes

- ¹ The author is working on *Non Seriousness*, a study on comical transgressions..
- ² Internet editions of “The Times”, 16 September 2009, “Gazeta Wyborcza” 15 September 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article6836190.ece#none>; http://wyborcza.pl/duzy_kadr/1,97904,7042324,Przyjacielu_gdy_zgine_przyjdz_na_moj_pogrzeb_w_sukience.html.
- ³ See: www.wykop.pl/link/236222/przyjacielu-gdy-zgine-przyjdz-na-moj-pogrzeb-w-sukience.
- ⁴ Resp.: <http://www.drudge.com/archive/125177/best-friend-dresses-up-soldiers-funeral> and <http://www.wykop.pl/link/236222/przyjacielu-gdy-zgine-przyjdz-na-moj-pogrzeb-w-sukience>. I would like to thank Daniel Brzeszcz for finding both quotations.
- ⁵ Actually, we should also ask whether we are not progressing towards reactions totally indifferent to such ostentatious sexual-costume manipulations, to coin a term. This is the conclusion one may reach while observing in the world media *No Pants Day*, when members of both sexes walk around only in their underwear, without producing (the probably) intended shock. Underwear is also accentuated as part of the fashion for *sagging* – the wearing of radically drooping trousers
- ⁶ I owe the below presented details to Katarzyna Kościeszka.
- ⁷ At this point, while associating an ostensibly distant fact, albeit belonging to a similar register or tone, recall the famous letter B turned upside down in the inscription: *Arbeit macht frei*, which, as we know from the explanations offered by its maker, a concentration camp locksmith, was supposed to be a jest, the only sort that he could make to oppose the machinery of the Auschwitz gehenna.

The Shadows of Europe. History and Metaphor

1.

The initiation story says: *On a beach in Sidon a bull was aping a lover's coo. It was Zeus. He shuddered, the way he did when a gadfly got him. But this time it was a sweet shuddering. Eros was lifting a girl onto his back: Europa. Then the white beast dived into the sea, his majestic body rising just far enough above the water to keep the girl from getting wet. There were plenty of witnesses.*¹ Just as every mythical tale so this one too has a number of variants; this is the reason why Roberto Callasso tells it in several ways, but the most essential appears in the above-cited fragment. This expressive image leaves an imprint upon memory.

From the catalogue of symbolic figures comprising a graphic abbreviation of Europe, the greatest career, as is known, was made in Western imagination by the vision of a comely girl seduced and raped by a virile bull. The narrative base for this image was provided by Greek mythology. Western iconography is full of assorted versions of the "rape of Europe" and likenesses of a young woman forcefully abducted by a zoomorphic deity. True, this image is revived in contemporary fine arts or political publicistics, but its power seems to have deteriorated somewhat. Texts relating to European identity, its boundaries and inner divisions sometimes mention: "raped Europe", but this figure is clearly treated metaphorically, a discernible signal of mental distance towards a once living image.² In turn, in the visual arts the topic of raped Europe appears relatively more often, albeit one may readily notice that in this particular case we are dealing with individual statements, many of which are proposed in ironic travesties that disclose a certain distance, while the range of their impact is narrow. Apparently, in collective imagination this symbolic image "giving food for thought" has lost the ability to describe and express contents that involve us.

Nature, as is widely known, does not tolerate a vacuum. The same holds true for culture. If the likeness of Europe as an alluring woman and a victim of perfidious rape is slowly fading and receding into an old curiosities shop, then in accordance with the above-mentioned rule some other image should take its place. Does there exist today a vital and impressive symbolic likeness in which contemporary European sensitivity could recognise itself? Are we capable of discovering a metaphorical expression that would cumulate European experience in such an ingenious way? Do such metaphors still appear in the contemporary discourse? After carrying out a source survey (admittedly fragmentary) I would like to propose two candidates that in my opinion would have a great chance to assume the position vacant for some time. They are the words-images: "home" and "spirit". Both possess enormous cultural rank and a rich metaphorical-symbolical potential.³ It still has to be tested whether the

slogans: "House of Europe home" and "Europe-soul" are promising from the cognitive point of view.

Consequently, take a closer look how the mirrors of those two capacious metaphors reflect a portrait of contemporary Europe, and if so, then what sort of knowledge about its inhabitants they disclose. Yes - I use the word: knowledge. In the domain of science no one any longer questions the cognitive value of the metaphor. Actually, the metaphor is almost universally recognised as a useful albeit non-discursive instrument of cognition.⁴ Ortega y Gasset, one of the first spokesmen of the epistemological values of the metaphor wrote that it simply serves the process of bringing closer that, which shines mysteriously on the horizon of our intellectual capacities.⁵ This suggestion was confirmed several decades later by Ricoeur: *A metaphor is not an ornament of discourse. It has more than emotive value because it offers new information. A metaphor, in short, tells us something new about reality.*⁶ In other words, it sometimes makes it possible to better grasp that, which in the space of thought is barely sensed or only assumed. It embraces as if in a single flash that, which the conceptual discourse is not always capable of noticing, aptly naming, and describing.

If this is the case then it is worthwhile to immediately accentuate a fact of special importance for our analysis. Examples cited further in the text, in which the afore-mentioned metaphors fulfil a revealing function, are, apart from their serious intellectual contents, fascinating also because they do not passively continue existing semantics with which language associates by force of habit, but achieve their creative and enhancing reinterpretation. It so happens that the metaphorical mirror in which we would like to observe the essential features of Europe possesses a special property, namely, its registers chiefly dark colours, as we shall soon see. It is worth keeping in mind that this certainly peculiar mirror (it has to be proved whether it is actually "crooked"!) certainly does not lie and at most shows with great intensity the most vivid elements of

the reflected image. In other words, it undoubtedly refers to that, which really exists and is the living matter of actual history.

2.

It is probably not an overly innovative thesis to maintain that in the political publicistics of recent years or, more widely: in discursive space encompassing texts referring in particular to the present-day shape of Europe and its problems, the most frequent has been the figure of the Home. In the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, upon the tide of the unification of Europe but also in the course of the still continuing expansion of the European Union by including new member states, political publicistics repeats *ad nauseam* phrases about the “common house of Europe”, the construction of a “new house of Europe”, a return to the “house of Europe”, and so on, and so forth...

The metaphor of the European home is conspicuously present in the excellent book by Thérèse Delpech: *Savage Century: Back to Barbarism*, which should not come as a surprise but, and this is much more symptomatic, it appears in invariably dark hues. Delpech is a French politologist, director of strategic problems at Commissariat à l'énergie atomique, researcher at Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, and member of the Institute for Strategic Studies and RAND Europe Advisory Board. The list of her posts indicates clearly that her analyses and expert opinions are conspicuously pragmatic and directly connected with current political praxis. Even more interesting within this context is the fact that Delpech has also proved herself to be a sophisticated scholar interested in culture and specially sensitive to the value and power of the symbol. I accentuate those two sides of the rhetorical strategy applied by Delpech because her book is a rare and actually brilliant example of the productive unity of contradictions. Excellent familiarity with facts from the realm of political history is supplemented time and again by symbolic tropes. The author readily resorted to them, and this sort of hermeneutic praxis is always justified cognitively: Delpech is concerned with a reconstruction of the anatomy of European identity, with particular apprehension for the catastrophes suffered by the twentieth century. On the one hand, there are perceptive political realism, historical erudition, and harsh facts, and on the other hand - a sphere of the imagination and literary fiction. Here politics and art overlap, creating a curious mixture of events from most recent European history. The “real” is viewed from the perspective of the “unreal” and the two cast a light on each other. This blend of two orders produces the outlines of a convincing intellectual construction. The outstanding study also credibly connects two qualities rarely encountered

under a single book cover: analytical aloofness and emotional rage.

Another feature worthy of accentuation is the cognitive attitude demonstrated by Delpech, free of facile simplifications and ideological superstitions. Sober perception, so strong in this case, is not tantamount to a catastrophic vision of history. The French author did not for a single moment assume the pose of a demented contemporary Cassandra. She merely attempted – and did so with rare honesty – to take another look at the European Continent and its blood-stained twentieth-century plight. More, she did so not only due to historical motives, but chiefly in order to carefully follow the symptoms of impending future. In other words, we are not dealing with fortune-telling but with a thorough and careful analysis of the symptoms of that, which could take place in the future and more or less lucidly emerges on the horizon of the contemporary historical moment. Her comments are supposed to incline the readers to once again embark upon a thorough reflection about twentieth-century history, with particular concern for signs delineating the outlines of the possible future.

The metaphor of the Home appears in the reflections pursued by Delpech already in one of the initial chapters. We immediately become cast into a discourse that is far from emotionally lukewarm. It has to be said distinctly - the expression: “the house of Europe” does not resound with pride or excessive warmth:

*The history of the last century showed the ease with which historical transformations of unprecedented violence could follow without warning on the heels of the best of times. As in Greek tragedy, crime engendered crime in the house of Europe, which twice set the rest of the world ablaze. From the experience, lessons were drawn for the reconciliation of the European nations. But what is now at stake is Europe's capacity to assume international responsibilities in a deeply troubled world. And from that point of view, the internal lessons just mentioned are insufficient. The unprecedented historical eruption from which the entire twentieth century arose does not speak only of the madness of Europe and of national passions. It is evidence of a wider adventure concerning humanity as a whole: the sudden appearance of storms whose warning signs on the horizon we Europeans have too long pretended to ignore, storms no one can control once they have been unleashed. When such sudden acceleration of history occurs, it signals the defeat of political action, which can do nothing but run after political events until it is swallowed up by them. If Europe has any message to transmit to the world, it is truly this one.*⁷

In other words, together with Delpech's politological reflection we rapidly depart from positive connotations usually associated with the metaphor of the home.⁸ The “House of Europe” described by the author is certainly not a safe space. It is neither haven

nor a refuge or asylum for its residents. True, it is still a family home, but its foundations rest on unexpired crime. It is, first and foremost, a space full of risk, uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. This is a home encumbered with its dirty family history, which it is incapable of getting rid of and with which, in the opinion of some, it is impossible to battle. Finally, it is a place in which phantoms appear and which brings to mind the image of *the haunted house* with its exemplary realisations by Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*), Poe (*The Fall of the House of Usher*), or Dickens (*The Haunted House*), so frequent in the English Gothic novel. This is a house full of the ghosts of the past returning at night. A house, which on the outside is imposing and noble but actually is in a state of advanced ruin. A house that conceals unresolved dark secrets.

In one of the subsequent paragraphs Delpech went on to expand this image of the European home. Once again she was assisted by literature, whose fictional products sometimes possess the amazing power of condensing historical experiences into a symbolic abbreviation. Together with successive close-ups the image of the “house of Europe” assumes a concrete form. Now, it becomes the familiar, gloomy castle from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the Danish Elsinore, the castle haunted by the Ghost of Hamlet’s Father. Recall, however, that this is also space that turns into the scene of consecutive tragedies, set into motion as if by accident. More: the titular character becomes an extremely credible *porte parole* of the European spirit: apathetic, listless, and immersed in *acedia*. European mentality seeks its reflection in the soul of Hamlet: capacious, ambiguous, and a puzzle even for him:

If one has to define the twentieth century with a single word, Herzfeld, the German for “sick at heart”, would be the most accurate. It designates a form of melancholy and a debilitation of the emotional side of human nature. Twentieth-century man finds a natural companion in the most universal of tragic heroes, Prince Hamlet, whose paralysis of will he shares. The century’s tragedies all arrived without having been willed just as Hamlet never willed the death of anyone, except for Claudius. The detour down which the human species began to travel early in the last century resembles a storm, whose causes and ultimate consequences it remains ignorant of. Those consequences are still washing upon our shores, like the belated waves of a great catastrophe of which we have not heard the last. Elsinore thus possesses exceptional symbolical power for the Europe of the twentieth century.

By chance, the two world wars were the occasion for many studies of Shakespeare’s play: like the Elizabethan hero, cultivated Europeans found themselves engulfed in barbarism with no time to understand what was happening to them. In a sense the mystery of Hamlet’s character held up a mirror to them: the more he was examined the more

*there was to elucidate. Death was the theme of the play, as it was of the century.*⁹

Delpech regarded this inability to conduct (the admittedly) difficult self-reflection to be the mortal sin of the European spirit. The titular *l’ensauvagement*, barbarity or, more literally, savagery of twentieth-century history is only rarely the object of thorough reflections. After all, the heart of the matter does not involve a simple registration of the phenomenon (this has been already performed by school textbooks!), but a meticulous and multi-strata analysis of the political, mental and, possibly above all, spiritual conditions that turned the “house of Europe” into a space of ghouls, death, and cruelty. The crux of the matter is a lively, emotional response but also a wise examination of the historical trauma on an individual and group scale. Apparently, the absence of such reflection is the reason why bloody history keeps on repeating itself. Add some sort of an organic (Hamletic?) unwillingness on the part of Europe towards embarking upon deeds, a clear-cut opposition towards barbarity. Examples from our recent past only confirm the aptness of this finding:

*While Europeans sleep, others become aware of the power of ideas. But the ideas that are spreading most widely are very much contrary to European values. Contempt for human life, the refusal to distinguish civilians from combatants, assassination presented as a duty - these are direct challenges to the values that our societies are supposed to defend. What price are we ready to pay to do that? Considering the EU’s reaction to the appalling massacre in Beslan, South Ossetia, in September 2004, we may conclude that the price must not be very high. Apart from The Netherlands, not a single Western government dared question Putin about his incompetent and ambiguous handling of the tragedy. It seems, however, that more than one question would be relevant, since information about the attack was available beforehand and not provided to South Ossetia, since the explosives and the weapons came from the Russian Interior Ministry, and since at least one of the hostage takers belonged to the Moscow police internal affairs service.*¹⁰

The “House of Europe” in the descriptions formulated by Delpech is also a museum full of junk from the past, of little value and submerged in the stultifying smell of mothballs. This is the source of the helplessness of its residents and their frequent conviction – evidently, quite correct – about the relegation of the “old Continent”, which not so long ago ruled over the whole world, to the margin of history. The “House of Europe” is not only haunted – it is simply lifeless, a space of vanishing vitality, and it seems that its inhabitants manage to move only thanks to the force of inertia and are devoid of a firm substrate. They resemble bloodless shadows from the Elysian Fields, wandering listlessly and without a purpose:

*Europe is at once turned too much toward the past (...). Like other Western societies, it lives in the moment and prevents it from adapting its present to its past and from imagining a future for itself. The reason it does it have a politics based on its thought is because that thought has ceased living. European democracy has become abstract like its values, unable to exercise the kind of influence in the world that the world needs. In a period of great international stability, this might have no consequences. In an era of profound transformations and exasperated passions this exhaustion is charged with danger. It is time for Europeans to interrupt the subterranean ruminations about history and start thinking about the future. Otherwise, others will do it for us.*¹¹

The paradox formulated at the beginning of this statement must be understood correctly. What does it mean that Europe looks towards the past and, at the same time, is cut off from it? This turn towards the past, a source of negative consequences for European awareness, should be understood as a ritual celebration by Europe of its former glory. The process of being cut off from the past is a traumatic burden, the result of the absence of reflections on the more profound – in other words, not only, and not predominantly political – reasons for its historical decline. Both gestures are the cause, increasingly often stressed by analysts, of the weakness of Europe as a space of ideas, the fragility and meagreness of the civilisation project called “Europe”, which, one has the impression, has exhausted its creative power and can be interred. European ideas no longer constitute a model for the rest of the world or even a source of inspiration. The most striking consequence of this state of things is the absence of a clearly outlined vision of the future. Europe is a home drifting helplessly on the sea of history, a leaking raft full of castaways with an obscure identity.

What sort of a future awaits this “house of Europe”, haunted and with quaking foundations? In the epilogue of her book, *nota bene* titled: *The Human Soul Torn to Pieces* (naturally, from our point of view it is impossible to ignore the fact that in the heart of this gloomy “home” metaphoric there appears and is excellently exploited its “ghostly” supplementation!)¹² Delpech stressed that our present-day situation resembles the one in 1905. The whole second part of the publication (whose protagonists include, i.a. Nicholas II and Wilhelm II, but also Blok, Bely, Einstein, Derrain, Freud, et al.) is a brilliant analysis of forecasts of future misfortune, whose symbolic onset was the year 1905. The French original version of *Savage Century...* appeared precisely a hundred years later, as if to strongly accentuate spiritual affiliation with that period. We know that history never repeats itself exactly, but it is possible to capture analogies between distant moments. The author insists that an earnest identification of certain signs of time is not only an

essential cognitive task but can protect us from the realisation – quite feasible – of a black scenario, from historical recidivism. What is it that we are concealing in the basement of our European home that we do not want to – or do not know how to – adapt?

*What is most peculiar about our age is the conviction that evil is installed at the core of history and our frenetic rejection of that conviction. Twenty-first-century man bears a strange resemblance to primitive man seeking to drive evil outside the known world and transform it into a taboo. For us as for him, evil brings misfortune, and we want it out of our sight. But the world no longer has any borders beyond which we might cast it. The experience of evil has such force in contemporary consciousness, and the disorder of minds and things is so evident, that what seems most pressing is restoring vigor to whatever might allay the ubiquitous anxiety.*¹³

Our situation resembles the mood prevalent in 1905 - similar to the inhabitants of that world we have eyes full of fear and anxiously await something that we foresee with a sixth sense but which we are incapable of defining and describing. This anticipation is connected in a mysterious way with traumatic memory relegated to the unconscious (the basement) regions of the European soul: *The history of the last century, that hortus inclusus, of which we remain unconscious prisoners, is so full of misfortunes on which to meditate that we sometimes feel the weight of the dead mowed down by wars and revolutions, wandering like ghosts through our cities demanding justice.*¹⁴ As long as we do not adopt that ominous heritage (at this point, I supplement the author’s reflection) the European home will be haunted by phantoms of the past. There is no doubt that we have to start thinking by considering that dark backdrop still present in the cellars of our European subconscious, because only such a strategy will enable us to discover once again the promise of the future, dim on the distant horizon. Crimes of the twentieth century are to a great measure committed by the subconscious, and this is why they remain so mysterious and menacing. Delpech cited with unconcealed emotion the words of François de Menthon, the French chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, who was certain that he was adjudicating “a crime against the spirit”, i.e. undermining the foundations of every civilisation. This is the sort of crime that leads towards a decline of the human race into barbarity: *More than fifty years later, those remarks are moving not only because they evoke the atrocities committed but because of the strangeness of the words used by the French prosecutor, particularly the deeply unfashionable expression “crime against the spirit”. We no longer understand what it designates: the loss of that which constitutes humanity itself.*¹⁵

The characteristic of the European home delineated in the discussed book certainly does not emanate excessive optimism. The “house of Europe”, it turns

out, is not merely a pleasant and friendly place, and its residents do not feel comfortable in it. Its twentieth-century portrayal brings to mind a collapsing ruin with a dirty past leaning time and again out of its basements. Apparently, Delpech toppled thoroughly our naive optimism born on the tide of a Union-oriented and very much *ad hoc* Euro-enthusiasm. She does not startle us but merely warns. By placing an analytical probe into the not so distant past of the Continent she pointed out the hidden sources of a possible repetition of the past.

*I looked upon the scene before me - upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain - upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows - upon a few rank sedges - and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees - with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveler upon opium - the bitter lapse into everyday life - the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart - an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime.*¹⁶

Is it so difficult to recognise in this great evocative fragment of *The Fall of the House of Usher* a repulsive (but credible) portrait of our “house of Europe”? Are we to such a degree under the spell of the unification project that we are incapable of feeling any sort of affiliation with it? Remember upon this occasion that a metaphor sometimes assumes a concrete form and does so with brutal literalness. Is the recently announced and widely commented case of the Austrian Josef Fritzl, who in the very centre of merry Europe (*Austria felix!*) for years imprisoned and raped his daughter in the basement of her family home, not – apart from moral revulsion accompanying this discovery – a painful confirmation of the aptness of remarks about a European home with an underpinning of horror? A house that is haunted, continuously and always¹⁷.

3.

It was probably Edmund Husserl who was the first twentieth-century philosopher – and certainly the first to propose such a strong formulation - to conceive Europe not as a geographical, national or political space but as a spiritual being. In his Viennese lecture titled evocatively: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* Husserl proposed to comprehend Europe not in topographic categories but mental ones or, in more risky albeit exact terms, spiritual ones: *Clearly the title Europe designates the unity of a spiritual life and a creative activity - with all its aims, interests, cares and troubles, with its plans, its establishments, its institutions. Therein individual human beings work in a variety of societies, on different levels, in families, races, nations, all intimately joined together in spirit and, as I*

*said, in the unity of one spiritual image. This should stamp on persons, groups, and all their cultural accomplishments an all-unifying character.*¹⁸

Husserl wrote outright about the “spirit of Europe” and its serious crisis, which in his opinion was closely connected with a re-orientation of Western thought into a naturalistic and objectivising current. I refer to the example of Husserl not for analytical purposes since tracing the “theology of the history of the West”, outlined so acutely therein, and “shaping the idea of European humanity” are not our supreme objective. I recall Husserl’s observations, which, on the margin, resound with the rhetoric of yore (“spirit”, “soul”, “spiritual Europe”) for two fundamental reasons. First: his comments comprise a solid intellectual base for all those thinkers who will perceive the canvas of Europe in “spiritual” categories and are sufficiently bold to write about the “European spirit”. Secondly: curiously, the reflections of two Czech authors - philosopher and theologian - about the “spirit of Europe”, at which I would like to take a closer look, owe much to the reconnaissance performed by the author of *Logical Investigations*. The first, the outstanding Czech thinker Jan Patočka – a student and to a certain extent an heir of Husserlian phenomenology - deliberating on the condition of Europe embarked upon certain motifs indicated by the master, although the course of his thoughts runs in a slightly different direction. The second, the Czech theologian Tomáš Halik – in turn, a student and to a certain degree an heir of Patočka - already considered directly the phenomenon of the “spirit of Europe”, checked by Husserl. In this intellectual rally race it was necessary to determine the point of departure for historiosophic thought. In our case, therefore, such a point of departure is Husserl and his musings, and the goal – those of Halik. Here, contemplations by Patočka play the role of a keystone between the two, and thus we shall start with them.

Just like Husserl, the philosopher from Prague strongly accentuated the metaphor of the soul as a useful tool for understanding the essence of European culture. In order to describe the basic core of European culture the Czech philosopher evoked the Greek idea of “concern for the soul” (*epimeleia tes psyches*), perceiving it as a foundation of the European existential, cultural, and political idiom.

Man is just and righteous owing to concern for the soul, which is the legacy of classical Greek philosophy. This means that truth is not given once and for all, nor due to its comprehension and acceptance, but that it is a lifelong self-controlling and self-unifying intellectual-life praxis. In Greek philosophy concern for the soul assumes two extreme forms: we care for the soul so that it could transverse the world *via* the eternity of the universe and in this fashion attain at least for a short time a form of existence fitting for the gods (De-

mocritus, then Aristotle); or, on the contrary, we think and learn to render our soul a hard crystal of being, a steel crystal tempered in the perspective of eternity. It is one of the possibilities of being which contains the source of motion, decisions about its existence and non-existence, i.e. dissolution in the indefiniteness of the instinct and unenlightened tradition (Plato).¹⁹

This conceit of the spirit as the foundation of Europe possessed for Patočka foremost importance, and he returned to it upon multiple occasions, both when he stressed the breakthrough nature of the introduction of this category (*psyche*) into the philosophical dictionary of the ancient Greeks, and when he emphasized the existential and cultural relevance of the conceit of "concern for the soul",²⁰ or when he distinctly marked a demarcation line between "spiritual man" and "the intellectual".²¹ Jacques Derrida, in a penetrating commentary on Plato, this time assuming the role of an analyst of famous fragments of Plato's *Phaedo* – *nota bene*, in the French philosopher's text a prominent role was performed by the entries: "spirit" and "Europe" – accentuated predominantly the mysterious and evasive nature of *psyche*, features so strongly indicated by the Czech philosopher.²² The inclusion by Patočka of the "spirit" into the European genotype was certainly not accidental, but a well conceived gesture.

In his theological and philosophical reflections Halik often referred to comments made by Patočka, but in this context something else is relevant: one could have the irresistible impression that the whole time his thoughts contain the philosophical legacy of the Prague phenomenologist. The constant point of reference, which for Halik is Patočka's *oeuvre*, is disclosed in a lecture given in Berlin in May 2003. Its modest title: *What Binds Europe?* seems to announce a rather routine set of banalities about "European values", but the Czech theologian turned out to be the winner of this intellectual confrontation. As is almost always the case he tried unconventional solutions, and his language is free of theological-catechetical newspeak. It is noteworthy that both in the study by Delpech and in her writings political reality enters into close relations with the rebirth of art. In his, let us recall, nominally theological deductions Halik referred to real facts of twentieth-century history but often, in order to render them more expressive, he cited aptly chosen literary examples that are always more than mere rhetorical ornaments. Halik started his reflections by questioning a certain disseminated and obvious view:

In connection with the progressing integration of Europe we frequently hear Christians demand: "give Europe its soul". I cannot help myself, but the longer I listen to this initially justified slogan that more it appears to be a superficial and outright arrogant cliché.

Is Europe really soulless? And if this were the case, does anyone have at his disposal such power as to be

capable of proposing and offering a soul for Europe? Is the person offering a soul not actually proposing exclusively ideology? No man and no institution – even the Church – is able to give a soul: we know from Goethe's *Faust* that it is even quite difficult to take a soul, since at the very last moment such an endeavour can be crushed by the One who is the only capable of granting and redeeming a soul.²³

One way or another, there are no doubts that the concept and metaphor of the spirit comprise the point of departure of Halik's considerations about the phenomenon of Europe. In doing so, he creatively approached the concept of dualistic anthropology, well embedded in European thought. If, according to it, man is composed of "soul" and "body" then such ingredients will be easily found in European identity: In the process of the transformation and expansion of the European Union prime interest is focused certainly on the "body of Europe" – its political, economic and administrative structures; it could appear, therefore, that the spirit of Europe has remained slightly in the shade. Is, however, the courage that leads towards present-day radical operations and changes affecting the body of Europe not based on some sort of non-verbalised conviction about the existence of a unifying principle, which lends "Europe" its meaning, that some sort of a force of inner attraction is at work here and merges Europe at the time of all those changes? Perhaps this is why we could use the "spirit of Europe" metaphor for describing this force?²⁴

The point is not, therefore, to once again whine about the soullessness of Europe or produce yet another publicistic pamphlet maintained in rather well-worn elegiac poetics. By following the example of Patočka cited *verbatim* in the successive paragraph Halik wished consider the rich contents of "the spirit of Europe" metaphor. In doing so, he drew attention to the need for a constant awareness of the fact that we are dealing with a metaphorical expression, i.e. a multi-motif product with extensive meaning. He was particularly concerned with avoiding an overly rapid identification of metaphorical contents and replacing "the spirit of Europe" metaphor with concepts most frequently evoked within this context: culture, religion, spirituality, and philosophy. Let us first allow the whole diverse scale of associations produced by this image be heard.²⁵

By emulating classical differentiations of metaphysical anthropology Halik mentioned three "powers of the spirit": memory, intellect, and will. In turn, by referring them to European history he showed in detail what each of those components means in reference to the collective organism, whose cryptonym was created by the metaphor in question.

Analysing the phenomenon of memory, Halik – and this is significant – was more willing to write about

forgetting. He showed that thanks to the eschatological heritage still alive in Christian science Europe frequently turned towards the future, a dimly outlined perspective of salvation. The revolutionary and utopian spirit intensively permeating European thought denoted a sometimes violent turn towards the future and contributed to rewarding the process of forgetting about one's past. To put it in stronger terms: towards sacrificing the past for the sake of the future. Secularisation and nationalisation only assisted this attitude. Halik proposed an interesting combination of the conceit of memory with that of the conscience. He argued that not only did they refer to identical domains but, on the contrary, they belong to each other inseparably and enter into the reaction of a hermeneutic circle. To possess knowledge about oneself, to possess one's identity is tantamount to knowing one's history and being able to tell it to others, both on a personal level and a group one. Nonetheless, memory without conscience is mute. Only the light of the conscience is capable of penetrating the nooks and crannies of our memory. In turn, to prevent conscience from being susceptible to ideological poisons it must graduate from an exacting school of historical memory. Seduced by promising visions of European integration we cannot forget the past of Europe and in particular its dark sides. This means a readiness to show compassion and "solidarity with the victims", as was put so poignantly by the German theologian Johann Baptist Metz.²⁶

The slogan that Europe places most often on its coat of arms is the intellect. In a brief recapitulation of the adventures of the intellect in European history Halik stressed the diversity of its comprehension. *Nous* and *logos*, *intellectus* and *ratio*, *Vernunft* and *Verstand* are not necessarily semantically equivalent concepts. Events with greatest effects in the history of the European intellect include an alliance of Greek intellect and Christian faith. One of the consequences, with a negative impact upon European thought, was the application of the Greek *instrumentarium* for the purpose of describing divine reality. Due to a thoughtless error the living God of the Old Testament became identified with the Aristotelian supreme being, the Unmoved Mover. This onto-theological hybrid was to haunt for centuries to come. Modern emancipation of the intellect and liberation from this theological supervision had two consequences. On the one hand, the intellect retrieved the rights due to it, and on the other hand there took place its distinction, resulting in the emergence of a current of dogmatic rationalism. The intellect freed from religious concessions started to brilliantly play the role of a harsh critic of assorted religious and ideological delusions. At the same time, there appeared within European space a new protagonist: the intellect blind in one (metaphysical) eye. This intellect does not understand itself and is incapa-

ble of excusing itself. Halik perceived one of the ways of leaving this *cul de sac* in expanding the conception of the rational, restricted to unambiguous Logos, and in opening the intellect towards the mythical foundations from which, after all, it originates.

Nothing probably characterises the European Continent and its spiritual identity as satisfactorily as the concept of the will. In his long history the European is constantly permeated by the will of power. "European will" time and again enters a state that Halik described as "European messianism": the truly essential features of European history include the urgent wish to convince the rest of the world, a tireless willingness to offer (...) always that, which in a given period Europe did not regard as its greatest gift, entrusted for the sake of a universal dissemination of goodness: Hellenic and Roman civilisation, Christianity, the emancipation of women, human rights, the protection of the natural environment...²⁷ From time immemorial the European readily assumed the role of a missionary converting others to his "infallible convictions", whose excess he always possessed, or the role of a travelling salesman trading in ideas that were supposed to be – and this is a premise with all the qualities of an axiom – forever superior. Europe performed a catechesis, imposed, urged, and handed out, perceiving in this process the fulfilment of its supposed spiritual mission. In front of our eyes the European will of might (and will of power) fell apart, leaving behind a shadow of its former splendour. Does Europe still have something to offer? The last question, referring to the "post-messianic" status of Europe, does not sound very convincing when asked by Halik (assuming that I captured his tone correctly): Who shall present, and what part of the European heritage to the new inhabitants of our Continent today and tomorrow?²⁸ At the same time, there is clearly no mention of "aliens" but of "our continent"; thus Halik accentuated the thought about the offer that Europeans can make. Old dreams about European might seem to have vanished irretrievably.

Having followed the basically "positive" (although, as we have seen, slightly contested) and culture-creating dimension of the European "spirit" Halik also mentioned and underlined its "dark" foundation. As an expert on psychoanalysis he was well aware of the fact – which he particularly stressed – that the will is always directed by motives. The latter could be situated on the surface, open and discernible, but they are also just as often concealed and embedded in the system of the unconscious. At the same time, and this is essential, hidden motives are beyond the range of our reflections, although this is not to say that they are absent. Halik thus postulated that while speaking about "the origin of Europe" one should speak not only about open phenomena, Europe's visible "bright consciousness", but also to fathom intensively and

earnestly the European “subconsciousness”. Since much of that, which affects Europe is concealed beneath the stratum of consciousness should we not examine also the “dreams cherished by Europe” and its “flawed undertakings”? Should we not study its myths and “archetypes”?²⁹ Halik suggested that gauging the archaeology of mythical narrations about Oedipus, Odysseus, Merlin, Ahasver, Faustus, Hamlet or Don Quixote could fulfil a revealing role and disclose the hidden - and not necessarily positively evaluated - aspects of impulses steering European projects, plans, and dreams.

We recall that in the reflections pursued by Delpech the metaphor of the “house of Europe” ultimately resulted in that of the “fragmented spirit”. In the case of Halik the opposite is true: the metaphor of the “stratified soul” together with its dark, low, and drive-focused foundation overlaps in a very natural fashion the familiar image of the “haunted house”: a house whose subterranean parts conceal wicked secrets.

Apart from the notorious European longing for “light” mention is also due to the poets, philosophers and mystics of the night. Europe stores many most valuable treasures in its dungeons. Once we examine the place held by European rationalism it seems appropriate to descend to the cellars of mysticism, esotericism and gnosis; since we tour the cathedral of faith we should not overlook the crypts of heresy, superstition and secret cults.

A fragment of the spirit of Europe consists of visions and fantasies concerning “the others”, who initiated their missionary, discovery-buccaneer or war expeditions beyond the boundaries of our Continent. To become acquainted with Europe means to see its relation towards other cultures and civilisations since it frequently transfers to them its hopes and fears as well as its shadows.

A bold project for European unity and a joint European home spanning from the Atlantic to the Ural Mts. is not built on unknown and unploughed soil. It is, however, erected on a foundation composed of a multi-storeyed arrangement of forgotten treasures and charred ruins, the burial ground of deities, heroes and felons, rusty ideas and unexploded bombs. We do not have to grant our Europe a spirit but from time to time we have to follow it towards “the mothers”, the underground, in the manner of Orpheus following Eurydice or the slayed Christ following Adam and the Old Testament fathers, depicted on old icons.³⁰

Halik persistently reminded us, his contemporary readers, of this simple truth, empirically tested by psychoanalysis: sometimes the repressed returns to the surface and does so with even greater force. He tells us about the traumatic lesson of twentieth-century totalitarianisms, a lesson, which we either did not comprehend or which we refused to deliberate on: The

conflagration of evil and violence, which swept across Europe during two world wars and under the rule of two inhuman “substitute religions”, i.e. Nazism and communism, destroyed, in the opinion of many people, both trust in the might of goodness as the foundation of the world (the metaphysical conception of God) and the Enlightenment-era trust in the intellect and the goodness of human nature capable of creating an ideal society with the assistance of the instruments of its rationality – the power of science and technology. A confrontation with the evil of two world wars, the secular regimes of the twentieth century, and such phenomena as Auschwitz and the Gulag demonstrated that an uncritical lay-humanistic belief in the omnipotence of human rationality was at the very least as illusory as uncritical dependence on divine authority from “the netherworld”. “The divinity of man” proved to be incapable of occupying the throne emptied after “the death of God”.³¹

Halik demonstrated that the spirit possesses a number of bright powers, which play their games in the day. At the same time, he stressed the importance of the exploration of the subconscious, the nocturnal and dark sphere that conceals everything that for assorted reasons we do not disclose or want to reveal to the outside world. Here we store our feelings, desires, and dreams that produce embarrassment and shame. It is here that elements of psychic life described as repulsive, rejected, and unwanted are to be found. Finally, it is here that contents repressed from the space of conscious life exist. Halik did not express this firmly, but I believe that completing his thought will not constitute abuse on my part. As was mentioned, it is in the nature of the repressed that it likes to resurface. If this is the case, then the analogy between the individual soul and that of the group is basically apt, and reflection on the “spirit of Europe” metaphor leads to a conclusion – close to the diagnosis formulated by Delpech – that for the sake of our spiritual wellbeing we should become acquainted with the nature of this dark space. Europe must descend to “the Mothers”, those enigmatic *personae* from the second part of *Faust*, and their dark kingdom in order to establish direct contact with the horror of this world of chaos. One has to pass through such initiation, known in Jungian terminology as “the integration of the shadow”. It is precisely the acceptance of the actual existence of the “shadowy spheres” and their subsequent inclusion into conscious life that is (could be) a condition for spiritual rebirth. Any other path is at best the maintenance of illusion, and in the worst case – of self-deceit.

Interestingly, those two distinctions, at first glance radically different both as regards the profession of their diagnosticians and the points of departure accepted by them, share fundamental conclusions. Delpech accentuated not the peace, warmth, and security of the

“house of Europe” but, on the contrary, its terrifying, concealed spaces. She revealed the horror of dark cellars haunted by phantoms of the past and brought to the surface dangerous and spiritually toxic places. Just as Edgar Allan Poe showed the symptoms of the disintegration of the house of Usher so she traced cracks on the walls of the once solid European construction. In a similar vein, Halik first stressed the possibilities and opening outlined in a “positively” comprehended metaphor of the soul. Interestingly, he ultimately concentrated on its dark “interior”. In doing so, Halik stressed and brought forth elements of the dark subconscious of the Europeans, the enormous and still pulsating regions of horror and wilderness. These are the cursed terrains, which we, as a rule, do not wish to know and maintain a safe distance, because subconsciously we experience their toxic power. Both texts, with their careful forecasts and far from optimistic, leave us in a state of uncertainty. There is, however, a single legible suggestion: reality will not change by itself, and, as always, everything is up to us. A transformation of the world has (must have!) a transformation of our interior as its foundation and an inalienable condition for potential.³² *A book must be an ice-axe to break the seas frozen inside our soul.* This motto taken from Kafka and opening the book by Delpech could be engraved on the façade of the renascent “house of Europe”.

4.

At the end of his comments about the “European spirit” Edmund Husserl, sharing his fears with the readers, recalled yet another symbol from the distant mythological European past: the symbol of the Phoenix undergoing rebirth, a strong and spectacular source of food for further thought. Described by the great phenomenologist it becomes the figure of future reborn Europe.

*Europe’s greatest danger is weariness. If we struggle against this greatest of all dangers as ‘good Europeans’ with the sort of courage that does not fear even an infinite struggle, then out of the destructive blaze of lack of faith, the smoldering fire of despair over the West’s mission for humanity, the ashes of great weariness, will rise up the phoenix of a new life-inwardness and spiritualization as the pledge of a great and distant future for man: for the spirit alone is immortal.*³³

Husserl wrote those words in 1935. As we all know too well, they were never heeded. Because they were not loud enough? Because no one wanted to hear them? Because they were said much too late? The catastrophe came almost on the next day. The Phoenix turned to ashes in the death camps. It seems, however, that more than seventy years from the time when they were written the above remarks – with the possible exception of their pathos and messianic hype – have not lost any of their therapeutic force. One could add: unfortunately.

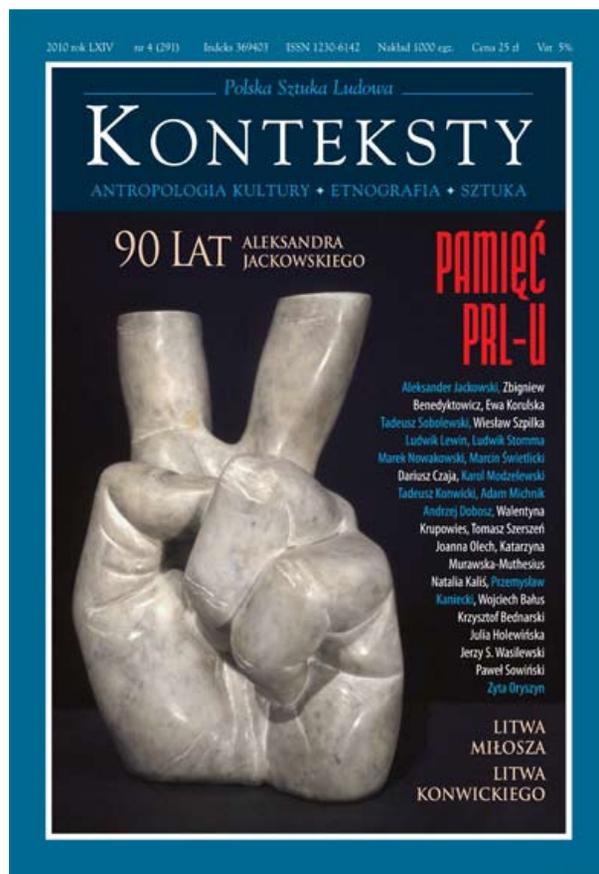
Today, we know for certain that the European Phoenix is not strong enough to rise on its own. We have to assist it. To put it differently: we must help ourselves and extract ourselves from the quagmire around us. “History” is a hypostasis and no one will perform our task for us. The problem lies in the fact that no one knows, or is capable of knowing, whether matters have not gone too far. The fact that the spirit is essentially immortal does not necessarily comfort us in this situation.

The sober voices of the two cited intellectuals, deprived of illusions but also far from barren pessimism, propose a difficult lesson, an ominous memento, and cautious hope. Those two tones resound very clearly, a circumstance that renders their identification extremely credible.

Endnotes

- ¹ R. Calasso, *Zaślubiny Kadmosa z Harmonią*, transl. S. Kasprzysiak, Kraków 1995, p. 14.
- ² M. Kundera, *Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej*, “Zeszyty Literackie” no. 5:1984. An acute polemic with the theses proposed by Kundera was conducted by Joseph Brodsky: *Why Milan Kundera Is Wrong About Dostoyevsky*, in: idem, *Pendulum’s Song*, Paris 1989, pp. 99-106; an excellent reconstruction of the ideological and mythological foundation of Kundera’s reflections combined with a critical analysis of the omission of the Balkans in his concept of Central Europe is to be found in a chapter in the book by Maria Todorova: *Balkany wyobrażone*, transl. P. Szymor, M. Budzińska, Wołowiec 2008, pp. 301-344.
- ³ An extensive set of symbolic associations connected with the “home” (a reconstruction based on Polish literary and belief material) is contained in the publication by D. and Benedyktowicz, *Dom w tradycji ludowej*, Wrocław 1992; on linguistic stereotypes and symbolic aura surrounding the “spirit” (an analysis based on the contemporary vernacular) see more in: D. Czaja, *Anatomia duszy. Gry językowe i figury wyobraźni*, Kraków 2006.
- ⁴ Texts about the cognitive role of the metaphor total hundreds and reference to even the basic corps would take up several pages. *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, Cambridge 1993, still remains an instructive anthology of texts on this topic. Owing to the holistic epistemological project directed against the philosophy of concepts let us note by way of example the study by Hans Blumenberg: *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie*, Bonn 1960.
- ⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Dwie wielkie metafory*, in: idem, *Dehumanizacja sztuki i inne eseje*, transl. P. Niklewicz, introduction S. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1980, p. 223.
- ⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja. Wybór pism*, transl. P. Graff, K. Rosner, Warszawa 1989, p. 133.
- ⁷ Th. Delpech, *Powrót barbarzyństwa w XXI wieku*, transl. W. Dłuski, Warszawa 2008, p. 41; my emphasis - D. C. Nb. The translation into the Polish is slightly more “narrative-oriented”, while the original has the brief and ambiguous: *Lensauwagement*.
- ⁸ J. Bartmiński, *Dom i świat – opozycja i komplementarność*, in: idem, *Językowe podstawy obrazu świata*, Lublin 2006, p. 168.
- ⁹ Delpech, op. cit., p.145.

- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 104-105.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 105.
- ¹² Analogisation between the image of the house and that of man is a frequent motif in symbolic imagination. Cf. Cirlot's remarks about symbolic oneirism: [...] *in dreams we employ the image of the house as a representation of the different layers of the psyche. The outside of the house signifies the outward appearance of Man; his personality or his mask. The various floors are related to the vertical and spatial symbols. The roof and upper floor correspond to the head and the mind, as well as to the conscious exercise of self-control. Similarly the basement corresponds to the unconscious and the instincts (just as sewers do in symbols pertaining to the city)*, J. E. Cirlot, *Słownik symboli*, transl. I. Kania, Kraków 2000, p. 112, s. v. House.
- ¹³ Delpuch, op. cit., p. 296.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., p. 297.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 304.
- ¹⁶ E. A. Poe, *Zagłada Domu Usherów*, transl. B. Leśmian, in: idem, *Opowiadania niesamowite*, transl. B. Leśmian, S. Wyrzykowski, Warszawa 1976, pp. 319-320.
- ¹⁷ From this viewpoint it is worth reflecting on the statement made by Elfriede Jelinek, who without any illusions explained the origin of the history of the "monster from Amstetten": *The terrible crime committed against Natascha Kampusch or the Fritzl family in Amstetten do not surprise me (and I would no want to know how many similar cases, about which no one will ever find out, still exist). (...) History allowed Austria to feel like a victim without any greater acts of penance, and to always hide behind a beautiful façade its active participation (for instance, in Nazi atrocities). Nonetheless, the repressed returns with doubled force. In Austria, both in concealment (as in the basement in Amstetten) and in public (the economic scandals of the recent period) things take place that could not be imagined elsewhere, at least in comparable countries. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that, e.g. in Germany the press is much more varied and more critical. I am particularly interested in the paradigmatic nature of such horrible stories as those from Amstetten, and am not surprised by the crimes committed in Austria, Elfriede Jelinek talks to Magdalena Miecznicka, "Dziennik", 16 August 2008.*
- ¹⁸ E. Husserl, *Kryzys europejskiego człowieczeństwa a filozofia*, transl. and introd. J. Sidorek, Warszawa 1993, p. 16.
- ¹⁹ J. Patočka, *Europa i dziedzictwo europejskie do końca XIX wieku*, transl. J. Zychowicz, in: idem, *Eseje heretyckie z filozofii dziejów*, transl. A. Czycibor-Piotrowski, E. Szczepańska, J. Zychowicz, Warszawa 1988, p. 111.
- ²⁰ The question, which we shall pose, will be as follows: is concern for the soul, located at the very source of European legacy, capable of creatively attracting our attention today, when amongst general weakness and coming to terms with decline, we need support to such a great extent, J. Patočka, *Sytuacja człowieka – sytuacja Europy*, transl. J. Kłoczowski, p. 191.
- ²¹ J. Patočka, *Człowiek duchowy a intelektualista*, "Logos i Ethos", no. 1:1993, pp. 125-134. I cite one of the closing paragraphs from this excellent text whose topicality appears to be constantly growing: spiritual man, capable of sacrifice and seeing its sense and significance (...) cannot be afraid. Naturally, spiritual man is not a politician in the commonplace comprehension of that term: he is not a side in the dispute conducted by this world but he is political in a different manner (...) because he compels society and all those around him to face that unobvious nature of reality, *ibid.*, p. 134.
- ²² J. Derrida, *Secrets of European Responsibility*, in: idem, *The Gift of Death*, Chicago-London 1995, p.15.
- ²³ T. Halik, *Co zespala Europę? Wykład berliński*, in: idem, *Wzywany czy niewzywany Bóg się tutaj zjawi. Europejskie wykłady z filozofii i socjologii dziejów chrześcijaństwa*, transl. A. Babuchowski, Kraków 2006, pp. 129-130.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 130, emphasis: D. C.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 131.
- ²⁶ J. B. Metz, *Teologia wobec cierpienia*, transl. J. Zychowicz, Kraków 2008, cf. in particular reflections on "theology after Auschwitz", pp. 31-59.
- ²⁷ Halik, op. cit., pp. 140-141.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 143.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 144.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 145, my emphasis - D. C.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 237.
- ³² 32. One more thing. Both analytical studies can be included into the wide and truly "unclear" category of texts from a domain of, so to speak, historical anthropology (in the case of Delpuch with an accent on the political sphere, and in Halik's writings - on the cultural-religious one). Apart from the contents they possess, in my opinion, yet another methodological value: they demonstrate how within the space of a single text it is possible to readily encounter symbolic anthropology (examining contents *in abstracto*) together with engagée anthropology (stressing the necessity of referring research conclusions to the real world). This benefits both approaches. At any rate, studies by Delpuch and Halik prove that between these two attitudes towards research into cultural reality there does not have to exist an insurmountable obstacle.
- ³³ Husserl, *Kryzys....*, p. 51.



The art of sense memory (...) does not make a claim to represent originary trauma – the cause of the feeling – but to enact the state of experience of post-traumatic memory.

Jill Bennett

The inaccessible can only be approached by being staged.

Wolfgang Iser

The story about the discovery of the art of remembrance, evoked by Frances Yates (1999|1966), in certain respects brings to mind the one shown by Jana Ševčíková in the motion picture *Gyumri* (2008).¹ Similar, albeit decidedly simpler and told from a distance of years, enveloped in the mist of a myth and transformed into a parable about (also) obligations towards the deities, it excludes (and even outright dismisses) the tragedy and trauma inseparably connected with the story conveyed in the film. In the first, disrespect for the gods and a gesture of pride precedes the tragic events, while in the other the element of protest and dissent sometimes appears after the fact. The first story offers us a simple anecdote about the way in which the poet Simonides of Ceos connected memory with place, and in this fashion allowed relatives to recognise the bodies of the massacred participants of a banquet after the ceiling collapsed in an interior in which they forgot that respect is due also to the gods. Simonides, who in the opinion of the person commissioning the panegyric needlessly revered Castor and Pollux, was invited outside, where he was supposed to have been awaited by two unfamiliar youths. The young men were not there, but they managed to perform their task well: the catastrophe took place immediately after his exit (1999, 1-2). The second story also says that it is impossible to live in a cemetery without creating a subtler and, at the same time, more complex art of memory ...

Gyumri is one of the oldest Armenian towns. Today, it has a population of about 170 000 and its origins go back to seventh century B.C. On 7 December 1988 at least 25 000 of its residents perished in an earthquake. Certain data mention as many as 80 000 victims.² One-third of the dead were children. Jana Ševčíková devoted four years to research and seeking witnesses, interviewing them, and shooting a film commemorating the tragedy or rather the way in which the survivors managed to tackle the ensuing situation. An important part was also performed by those who were born "after the fact" – some were already adults at the time of work on the film. Ševčíková thus examined also post-trauma experience. Actually, the film is about assorted variants of the art of memory. It is also about history – the way in which film (and photography?) can successfully tackle it. *Gyumri* is proof that sometimes it is capable of achieving this feat, and very well to boot.

SŁAWOMIR SIKORA

Living Memorials. Forms of Memory and Oblivion in the Film *Gyumri*

History, memory, the media

Naturally, one may ponder the way in which the existence of such literal traces and records as the photograph and the film influenced history. Thomas Elsaesser noticed that the purpose of Siegfried Kracauer's book: *From Caligari to Hitler* was not so much the history of the film as social history; at the same time, he suggested that the cinema could actually supplant history: *Suppose (...) that cinema was the beginning of the end of history, the apparatus that would contribute decisively to the suspension of history* (after: Willis, 1995, 80). This declaration – taken out of its context – could probably be compared to famous announcements predicting the death of painting after the invention of photography. A similar view, although slightly different, about photography and history was voiced by Roland Barthes maintaining that the invention of photography could inaugurate history. *Perhaps we have an invincible resistance to believing in the past, in History, except in the form of myth. The Photograph, for the first time, puts an end to this resistance: henceforth the past is as certain as the present, what we see on paper is as certain as what we touch. It is the advent of the Photograph – and not, as has been said, of the cinema – which divides the history of the world.* (Barthes 1981, 87-88, see also: 93-94). These ostensibly contradictory and mutually excluding opinions can, paradoxically, be close and even enhance each other. Both indicate that the appearance of photographs (still and motion) was the onset of a different comprehension of history and comprises a social caesura in its pursuit.

Kirsten Hastrup (1987) noticed that memory and history can be treated as two kinds of art of memory – separate but also mutually penetrating. The former appears to be older, closely connected with the oral, emotions, and corporeality, while the latter places trust more in writing and the logical, the linear, and the rational. The first is closer to the myth, while the second is often inclined towards ideology (understood widely as belief in certain procedures and premises). The former thus retains a human perspective (the ex-

perience of an individual), while the latter frequently places itself within the range of the outer, objectivising perspective, the outer (imposed, objective) perception. Finally, and this is extremely significant, the first can be a perspective of the conquered (also, one may add, those vanquished by fate – as in this particular case), while the second usually serves the victors.³ Obviously, today we see decidedly clearer that it is impossible to easily and distinctly outline a border between the two. History increasingly frequently resorts to the perspective of memory, whose setting into motion appears more purposeful not only in the case of such sensitive and controversial topics as the Holocaust, where the traumatic nature of events excludes to a certain extent their objectivisation and outside perception.⁴ Pierre Nora (1989) proposed the capacious term: “site of memory”, comprehended already not as an actual place linked with events (as in the earlier mentioned anecdote connected with Symonides and the participants of the feast) but as a place constructed and created intentionally.

This perspective was put to amazing use in Ševčíková’s *Gyumri*, a composite essay not so much about tragic events as about the complex art of memory devised by those who survived and those who were born immediately afterwards. In this case, the film appears to be a peculiarly well-selected medium for telling a story. It also possesses an extremely interesting construction: we move from external to “internal” images, from objectivised history (documentary shots) to contemporaneity (the time of shooting the film), from recollection (the remembered image) to the present-day situation and, finally, from the visible to the invisible.

The film starts with detached takes of bleak mountains seen from a distance. Snow capped peaks, meadows with grazing sheep. (It is worth adding right at the onset that the ambiance and rhetoric of the film are brilliantly co-created by the music). A boy declares off screen: *When I last dreamt about my brother and sister, we were at home on the couch. We watched video of the earthquake and they saw their own death.* (Cut). A black screen features the date: 7 December 1988. (Cut). A tower clock shows 11.40 a.m. Successive black and white takes. People carving (restoring) an ornament in some sort of an interior, with a fragment of an old church (market place?) visible through an open door. Blackout. Sepia shots taken from a helicopter (?) of a town totally in ruins. A shot of an inner wall of a house, with a photograph of a married couple hanging on the wallpaper. Zoom. The upper storey of a building: the inside wall has become the outside one... Homeless people wearing coats amidst the ruins, bonfires, infants in cradles in the open... People busy among the rubble... People carrying coffins... Hundreds of coffins lying in the streets... A picture of a catastrophe.

A take of the face of a young woman: *I will show you my daughters (...)* – she searches for the photographs and displays them – *Viyana Borisovna (...)* *They were at home with my mother. I believe they left before it began (...)*. Cut. The same woman twenty years later – a close-up of her face, still attractive but decidedly older: slight ticks could indicate a nervous condition and an undying memory of tragic experiences (interior of the home in colour). *My friend’s mother consoled me. She said: Your children have become angels. Don’t look for them.* Next, statements made by successive persons: archival takes of destruction interspersed with likenesses of the narrators. *When I become conscious, I was buried. Everything was lying on top of me. The school had collapsed. There was darkness. I couldn’t breathe. (...)* *I heard voices. My schoolmates were dying one after other.* He sings. *I sang this song under the rubble to comfort my schoolmates.*⁵ One of the mothers describes the bad premonitions she experienced that day. She even intended to stop the children from going to school, but when she turned around she suddenly experienced emptiness all around...

Documentary images (film records), contrasted with those retained in memory from the day of the events, subsequently become a record linked with the present. One of the women opens a wardrobe full of “souvenirs” of the children. The bed linen ironed by her daughter Armina just before death is arranged exactly the same. The mother takes the clothes that Tiran (the son) wore during the earthquake out of a box and shows them while speaking in an emotionless, impassionate voice. *I changed him and saved them like holy objects.* She kisses the garments and displays the shoes brought for her son from France. *After the earthquake, I took them off to save in his memory.* From a purse she extracts a letter addressed to her daughter by a boy in love with her. *Here’s a pen. A comb, a mirror...* The enumeration is totally devoid of emotion. We are touring a crypt full of relics. Here, memory remains untouched and closely guarded, one of the possible types of reaction. *When I cleaned this room that time, I had a dream that night. Armina appeared to me in the dream. She came in and lay down like so.* The camera shows high heel shoes and a dressing table, moves around the room and finds a hanging photograph of the girl, while another large photograph over the bed is reflected in a mirror. (Off) *I believe she comes daily, and she’s pleased with her room.* The cut is followed by a photograph of the younger son, Tiran, on display in another room. Gentle close-up centralising the perspective. Off screen, the mother says: *I declared war on the whole world and on God. Because he didn’t leave me at least one of them.* Cut.

A vivid sixteen-eighteen year-old girl dances (loud music) and is shown interchangeably reflected in an old, damaged wall mirror and then directly *en face*.

When looking at the reflection in the mirror we see on the wall opposite a large photograph of another girl. Filmed in an exterior scene, she says: *My parents gave me the name of my sister. They felt it was right. I also think this name is good for me. I lost a great sister. They told me a lot about her. I'm proud my name is hers. I must do everything so my parents don't feel sorry my sister died.*

Another woman speaks in a similar tone: *When the little one was born we gave him his brother's name. Maybe it was right that way. Every time we say Araik's name, it seems to us he's home. And nothing happened to him.*

Living memorials

The successively shown similar albeit distinctive stories indicate that children were frequently given the names of their tragically deceased siblings. Sometimes, the birth of those children was planned, upon other occasions - not. Occasionally, as in the last cited statement, we begin to doubt whether this practice was appropriate (perhaps our uncertainty is the derivative of consecutive questions). At other times, the surviving child "forces" the parents to provide siblings. This "substitution mechanism" also possesses a strong cultural dimension: the identity of a name appears to be an extremely significant and often conscious way of dealing with memory and, as a consequence, with forgetting. One of the women described the idea of a monument commemorating her children and her subsequent disillusionment with its emotionless nature: *At that moment, I decided to have more children. So these children would be living, walking memorials.*

Due to an interesting selection of the statements made by assorted persons Ševčíková managed to outline a whole spectre of attitudes associated with tackling a traumatic situation. One of the most intriguing appears to be the phenomenon of the "living memorial". Biological succession must obtain its cultural dimension – such is the meaning of the process of granting names "in memoriam", in honour, as a replacement of the deceased siblings. The process appears to be particularly significant in certain traditional cultures – as in the discussed instance - in which names possess essential importance. The beginning of the text by Jala Garibova and Betty Blair (about the importance of names in Azerbaijan) could act as a commentary on the socio-cultural phenomenon of giving the names of dead children to their "posthumous" brothers and sisters:

Names are the DNA of the social organism we call community. One tiny strand of letters carries an incredible amount of vital information in terms of a person's social heredity. From a single word, it is often possible to determine a person's gender, education level, social and economic status, language, religious preference, sense of aesthetics and values, political inclinations, nationality, age (in terms of historic period), and sometimes even birth sequence.

Like DNA, names not only reflect the inheritance of the past, but in a general sense, they map out expectations and possibilities for the future (Garibova and Blair 1996; see also: Lotman and Uspienski 1998).

Such a socio-ontological dimension of memory encoded in the name (DNA) appears to be an extremely adequate metaphor. The idea of the "living" and the "dead" monument recalls somewhat the dilemma mentioned by Plato, who in *Phaedo* deliberated about writing as a measure for improving memory (Plato 1975). Apparently, in this case, the "natural" and "self-generated" (?) measure is special mediation (the question is: to what extent is it always fully intentional?) also between memory and forgetting.⁶ Memory appears to be deposited in younger brothers and sisters; in this manner, it is always present. Those children become a special "photograph" of the absent siblings, which can be constantly looked at; they are a peculiar *tableau vivant* with "double reference" and we are entitled to presume that the first, "earliest" one becomes increasingly enigmatic and in time vanishes and then they start to "represent" primarily themselves. The stories presented in the film show that this could be a complex process that does not easily succumb to linear time. At this stage, it is difficult to cite all the nuances and idiosyncrasies. The above-quoted mother of Araik declares that saying aloud the name of the "new" child is the reason why the deceased one seems to be still present (*it seems to us he's home. And nothing happened to him*), while another mother admits that she was unable to use the name of the dead son given to a successive child. When the latter reached the age at which the older son died, the mother, in a strange ritual arranged in front of the camera (but probably not only for the sake of the camera?), named him as if once again. From that moment, he would be able to use his name "legitimately".⁷ Differences in treating the "new" children best demonstrate problems linked with attempts at a typification of the phenomenon and stress the impossibility of discovering unity even within the range of a "given type".

This special *mimesis* brings to mind problems associated with the idea of reorientation envisaged by Michał Paweł Markowski. A new child "performatively represents" the deceased one, renders him present (and replaces him). He represents but, at the same time, this relation remains flexible and variable in time – the second child becomes increasingly separate and "individualised", a representative only of himself.⁸ This rather mechanical comparison and schematisation appear to be in their way inappropriate, since they objectivise the relation in question. Quite possibly, the metaphor of the "graft", analogous to the way it was applied by Paul Ricoeur, would be more suitable.⁹

Such a solution could be a particularly interesting way of making possible the work performed by mem-

ory. Edouard Claparède indicated the difficulty encountered whenever we try to refer to emotions from the past: *It is impossible to feel emotion as past (...). One cannot be a spectator of one's own feelings; one feels them, or done does not feel them; one cannot imagine them without stripping them of their affective essence* (after: Bennett 2006, 27). Presumably, the successive child becomes simultaneously an embodiment of the deceased one and makes possible constant contact with "living emotions". The fact that this is not an easy task is mentioned in the statement made by the mother who recalled a living monument and, at the same time, described how throughout her whole pregnancy she suffered from extreme emotions and thoughts.

This "living memory", however, also has a second aspect: the children born afterwards, as if "a replacement", who bear the burden of "the memory of another", become an embodiment of the memory of their deceased siblings. Following the example of Julia Kristeva one could probably say – although she did so in slightly different context – that siblings born after a tragedy become identified with a special tomb concealing the dead (2007, 150). That, which according to Kristeva can be perceived as a singular burden conducive for the emergence of depression apparently does not always have to be comprehended as an "alien body", a yoke borne against one's will, at least in those cases with which we are becoming acquainted. This attitude towards deceased siblings, that peculiar *alter ego*, which no longer exists (in this world), can be composed and spans from pride (the afore-mentioned dancing girl) to greater ambivalence in which we may seek even certain complaints expressed indirectly: *She has always compared me to my brother. There is nothing she wouldn't compare. Everything I've done, she's always compared.*¹⁰ (Tiran II)

The camera as mediator and catalyst

Ševčíková managed to skilfully blend images showing that despite wounds and scars life goes on. Brief inserts of school (pre-graduation ball?) and family events, boys playing computer games, etc. Nonetheless, in various ways this "normal life" has become strongly and inevitably involved in the past and memory. This is a true burden. A girl dancing in front of a mirror confesses directly to the camera: *I'm so different from my sister (...). When I look at her photo I ask her how I should do things. I think she always gives me good advice. Every moment, every second, I feel her next to me, even though I only speak to a photo. Mariam, I'd like you to come once into my dreams just as you were, just as you were. (...). And if you can hear me now, Miriam, come for a chat. I would like that very much.* A boy admits that he always goes to the cemetery alone and wonders if he and his brother constitute a "single soul"; if so, then he is actually sitting next his own grave. Further on, he

adds: *When I look at brother's photo I know that it's only a photo. There is nothing beyond the picture. Our soul is the same. I don't know if it's believable, but I believe his soul is in me. I don't know how it happened, but I think it.* Tiran II, on the other hand, declares that sometimes his dead brother walks up to him from the back and *places a hand on my shoulder and embraces me. As if I was shivering.* The first time this took place he was frightened, but no longer. The past with which he is doomed to live is present constantly – it has left behind scars and marks: visible ones about which it is sometimes possible to speak, and those that do not reveal themselves directly. One of the fathers became ill after his son's demise: he now suffers from a wound that refuses to heal (a sticking plaster placed at the level of his eyes almost totally blinds him). A son born already after the tragedy confesses while facing the camera: *Why aren't you with me? If you were here, father wouldn't be ill. When our parents found you, it was horrible stress for father. He didn't eat for more than a week. (...) Father has this wound since. (...) If you were with us, none of this would have happened. And I wouldn't even be here.*

Ševčíková did not seek credibility by means of simple *mimesis*; it is to be supplied by archival photographs from the catastrophe, comprising an important context albeit one that deals only with a single dimension of the past. She did, however, manage to discover "inner history", the way in which it lives on in memory, as well as an "inner landscape" left behind by the historical event. History is palpable, which does not mean that it is always visible. The author has been capable of avoiding the process of seeking refuge in the dubious visualisations and reconstructions sometimes used in films. When persons born "after" tell their stories (sometimes we hear them also off-screen) they are filmed *en face* and frequently in an exterior scene. This approach could be treated as a very special extraction of a given person from the context of his place and an even greater focus of attention on the personal perspective. They speak/confess directly to the camera, thus stressing even more that if we are dealing with history then this the sort of history that is *e x p e r i e n c e d* at present, in other words, we are witnessing not so much representation as presentation, disclosure, and revelation close to the Heideggerian comprehension of *aletheia* – truth as disclosure and unconcealment. This is an experience of the *ereignis* of another reality into which we may take a partial look.

Those who survived the tragedy as a rule refer to memory, narration about *e x p e r i e n c e s* and feelings, and rarely mention the present. Those who were born "after" speak almost exclusively about the present, "express the consequences of events" that, it might seem, do not have to affect them directly (and this is probably what takes place) but affect them totally; sometimes, such awareness comes close to the

question about the reason for one's existence (*And I wouldn't even be here*), or dilemmas concerning a single, shared soul (standing over "one's grave"). The camera, that special transparent/non-transparent medium, takes part in those direct contacts; at times, it attempts to conceal its existence and in this particular case it becomes a special catalyst¹¹ not so much (not solely) of meaning (which ultimately must be reconstructed by the viewer)¹² as the expression of direct experience.¹³ I am well aware of the certain abuse carried by those words. And yet ... Ševčíková lucidly constructed and evoked meanings, "performatively" created an inner group portrait made up of particular stories. This is more of a Cubist portrait showing a single "phenomenon" in numerous reflections. If invisible things are involved, then one of the more interesting ways of tackling the problem could be the game, conceived as a serious game (Gadamer 1993; van der Leeuw 1991; Turner 1988).

In the film, particular "levels" of reality merge and intertwine.... It is the camera that plays the part of mediator and catalyst. No longer is history the only to merge with the present. Thanks to the camera (*via* the camera) particular figures communicate with the living and the dead. Sons speak to a father who for years has been living in America, younger brothers and sisters turn directly to their dead siblings (*Mariam, I'd like you to come once into my dreams just as you were. (...) And if you can hear me now, Miriam, come for a chat*), a taxi driver appeals to his son, for whom he has been searching for nearly twenty years: *I searched the world for you. You are my sacrament. You're my most precious thing. I want you to know wherever you are, even if you don't want to live with us, make yourself know. Then you can return to them. I am waiting for you. I have your name engraved on my ring, son. Written right here. I don't know what else to say. We live in hope and wait.* Paradoxically, the last family is dealing with the existing situation the worst. The child survived the catastrophe and was taken to hospital but then vanished. He was never found either among the living or the dead, and was probably abducted by other parents who had lost a child in the quake. Certain traces led to neighbouring Georgia, but despite a search the father did not manage to find his son. The family still waits and hopes that the boy will return, that he remembers his real parents, and for many years has been living in a state of suspension.¹⁴

Finally, the camera mediates between the protagonists and the viewer. I have in mind in particular those takes in which the (predominantly) young protagonists speak directly towards the camera. Thanks to this trick Ševčíková overcame distance. From the point of view of the protagonists, we, the spectators, gain the same ontological status as their dead brothers and sisters. How far and, paradoxically... how close. It is worth drawing attention to the motif of the con-

versation with the dead *via* photographs, mentioned upon several occasions¹⁵.

It would be difficult to classify Ševčíková's film unambiguously. She has made use of elements - especially when she touched upon a sphere that is both present and absent (invisible) - that should be regarded as performative. In doing so, she applied special evocations and avoided attempts at representation, always dubious in such cases. As a result, we reach the invisible centre - truth revealed albeit not shown. By resorting to this operation she managed to touch the truth of ever living emotions. In the case of older people (the survivors) those emotions are, as a rule, supported by images of memory. Among the young such memory is living presence and not an image. This extremely interesting film possesses the features of constructed and evoked truth that ostensibly would never come into being without the filmmaker and her camera.

The story told by Simonides of Ceos implicates the offended gods into the birth of the art of memory. In the case of *Gyumri* other forces also become engaged in the explanatory and justifying story. A universally held version links the Armenian tragedy with an explosion of an enormous arms cache stored underground, the supposed cause of the secondary and most powerful quake. This belief is mentioned by several persons, and the story starts and ends with Tiran II. The last words in the film are: *My mom hasn't set foot inside any church to this day. She promised when this church is repaired, she will have us baptized in it. I won't be baptized until then.*

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Endnotes

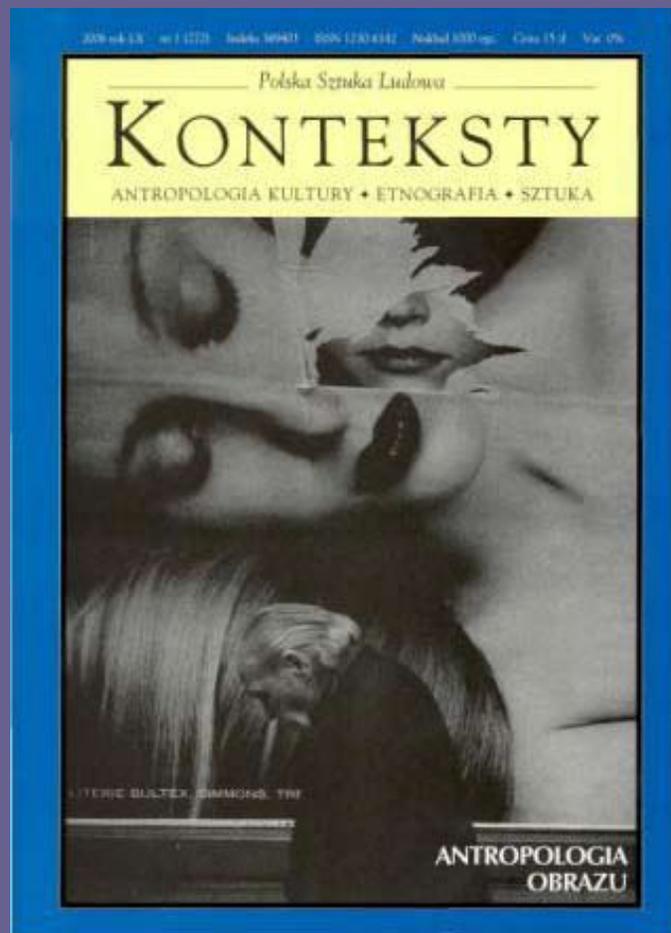
- ¹ I saw the film for the first time at the Dialektus Festival in Budapest (2009), where it won first place in the "Deep Description" category. It was also shown at Planet Doc Review (Warsaw 2009), and then on the Planète TV channel.
- ² The estimates are probably exaggerated, but in those years the population of the town declined by 100 000: in 1984 it totaled 222 000, and in 1989 - barely 122 587 (source - Wikipedia, entry: *Gyumri*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyumri#cite_note-3; access: January 2010).
- ³ One could ask whether the film, which brings to mind *Memory* (MacDougall 1998, chapter 12), is not a form of evoking reality more suitable than writing (see: Tylor 1986).
- ⁴ Cf., e. g. Frank Ankersmit, *Narracja, reprezentacja, doświadczenie. Studia z teorii historiografii* (2004). This change of the perspective from objectivising to one closer to particular individuals or groups is heard increasingly often; it appears vividly and enigmatically in an interview held by Jacek Żakowski and Pierre Nora: J. Ż.: *You can write history. / P. N.: For whom? Who is still interested in history? / J. Ż.: Everyone is somehow interested. / P. N.: «Somehow» is an apt word. Actually, today people are concerned with reminiscences*, Żakowski (2002, 67). On the change of the perspective from outer to inner cf. also Sikora 2009a; the memory discourse appears to be decidedly important especially when we touch upon traumatic history.
- ⁵ Here, the status of the statement changes, narration (story-telling) becomes performance, and we enter the domain of performativity.
- ⁶ I am far, however, from reversing this perspective, as was done by, e.g. Marc Augé in: *Les formes de l'oubli* when he

noticed that a return to the time of the beginning is connected with rituals and festivities and associated with the obliteration (forgetting) of all that occurred on the way. This observation can be encountered in the writings of Mircea Eliade, although the Romanian expert on religion placed emphasis elsewhere (nonetheless, it remains a fact that such an intellectual provocation on the part of Augé makes it possible to take a different look at those problems). Cf. Augé 2009.

- ⁷ *Today at 11:40 you have reached the age of your brother at the moment of his death. From now on, son, I will try to say your name. I have to. I gave you his name so that we would always hear it, but I couldn't manage to say it. You also wanted it this way, Tigran? Do you know how much responsibility you have? Not only a name, but also lost dreams to become reality. You have to try to realize your own dreams as well as his. You are not only his continuity, but you are your own person, son. Starting today, you and Tigran both exist.*
- ⁸ Michał P. Markowski cited Wolfgang Iser: *Representation and mimesis have therefore become interchangeable notions in literary criticism, thus concealing the performative qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object. (...) The inaccessible can only be approached by being staged.* (2006, 289)
- ⁹ Certain words-metaphors appear to be suitable when they concern people and the world of difficult emotions.
- ¹⁰ The mother of Tiran (who appeared in the earlier described room-crypt) admitted: *A year or two ago I was still looking in my children for the first ones. I compared everything - eyes, movements, words... I loved the dead ones through the living ones. I tried to stop missing them this way.*
- ¹¹ The camera as a catalyst of events is a conception present in anthropological reflections at the very least from the time of Jean Rouch.
- ¹² It is often said that film images-narrations are in this respect more polyvalent than the text: the text communicates/stores meaning while images are illusions/depictions of events.
- ¹³ In the second part of the film in particular we deal not so much with representations as with attempts at evocation interestingly favoured by the camera. It is the latter (the cameraman) that becomes the catalyst of recollections, and thus also of emotions and meanings. The very role/function of the camera in the film succumbs to change and from registration/representation of external reality it gradually undergoes a transformation to become an instrument of evocation; it seems to be conducive for reflection and certainly for the verbalisation of emotions and thoughts (on the term: evocation cf. Tylor 1986).
- ¹⁴ From the anthropological point of view such suspension can be compared to staying in the liminal sphere, on the border of life and death, the impossibility of "getting out" of it or transition to any other side. The grandmother of a lost boy says: *Dear Pula, I'm waiting for you. I won't die until I see you.*
- ¹⁵ Ševčíková conducted an interesting differentiation: those who survived the earthquake are, as a rule, interviewed at their homes but the young - those who were born already "after" - often speak directly to the camera outside the home (the sole exception being a girl who although familiar with the story of her parents and older siblings for all practical purposes lives "outside" it). We are entitled to assume that Ševčíková, wishing to hear the young people, was compelled to leave the site "suffused" with memory.

Volume II

Anthropology of Film



Cover: Photo by Tomasz Szerszeń

Anthropology of Film. Introduction

In the wake of a special monographic issue about the theatre going back to its sources, the “theatre contaminated with ethnology”, and texts focused on the anthropology of the theatre (cf. “Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty” no. 3-4/1991) we present a fascicle on the anthropology of film and photography. It seems that there is no need to justify this topic (or its selection). For some time the encounter of anthropology and film, the anthropology of culture and scientific, critical and humanistic reflection on the cinema has been quite natural. Multiple sources, reasons, and testimonies of such meetings can be cited. Suffice to mention the remarks made by Yuri Lotman in an introduction to the Polish edition of his *Semiotics of Cinema*, where in an astonishing comparison of the Athenian rite and myth with Roman Polanski’s *Knife in Water* the author spoke laconically (and such could have been the response and justification in the case of every ethnographer and anthropologist of culture concentrating his attention on the cinema) that even the most contemporary film can be decoded with the assistance of the myth deeply concealed within. *There comes to the fore*, Lotman wrote, *one of the most characteristic features of the cinema, which elevated it to the rank of avant-garde art of the second half of the twentieth century. True, the inclination towards neo-mythologism, the process of stirring the deep strata of culture are a phenomenon characteristic for art of the last decades. Nonetheless, nowhere outside the cinema do assorted types of the organisation of the material – from genre forms totally absorbed with a credible recreation of daily existence to the form of the generalised structure of the myth – blend so organically while penetrating each other.* Further on, Lotman drew attention to the specific duality of the film: *In this fashion, the language of the film unites extreme logical rungs – from the sensual experiencing of the actual perception of things (a feeling of a direct reality of the world shown on screen) to extreme illusionariness. At the same time, there takes place a merge of historical stages – from the most archaic forms of artistic consciousness to the most contemporary ones. Such unification does not by any*

means obliterate extremity; on the contrary, it accentuates it as much as possible.

This duality of film corresponds to the specific bipolar nature of anthropological perception simultaneously focused on the archaics, the structure of long duration, and the contemporary. In this case too we are not dealing with the blurring of differences and extremities, just as in the equally concise definition of ethnography: *Ethnography is a science about that, which connects people of different societies, cultures and epochs.*

We may come across this dialogical perspective of ethnography also in the admission made by Levi-Strauss, who described it as history whose two extremities touch the history of the world and personal history, and which at the same time discloses their joint rationale by considering differences and transformations of importance to all concerned.

Within this context a similarly laconic definition of ethnography as a way of reaching a different world should not come as a surprise; the same holds true for the declaration that ethnography is predominantly a rendition of the topical, an expression of vitality. This is the way in which the natural, obvious, and multifaceted interest in the film on the part of the anthology of culture becomes understandable. The anthropologist is absorbed with the film, first and foremost, as a myth, an expression of currently emergent mythology, and a domain of the occurrence (frequently in a concealed manner) of eternal mythological motifs and deep symbolic structures. It is precisely the film in its capacity as a myth-creating carrier (a domain of the continuation, transformation, and “revival of meanings”) and as a record of contemporaneity (the film registers customs, gestures, motions, models of beauty, fashions, thematic tendencies, the mental structures of a given period, etc.) as well as owing to the reflection of differences, rendered indelible within it or the mixture (or levelling) of cultural diversity, that matches a specific sensorium moulded within the range of the anthropology of culture.

Characteristically, we may find theses about the inclination of contemporary art towards neo-mythologism also amongst many researchers studying culture. In this instance, film is not alone but is accompanied by the experiences of the theatre and literature, as Mircea Eliade mentioned in his conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet in *Ordeal by Labyrinth*.

It is a well-known fact that literature transmitted orally or written is the offspring of mythology and inherits the latter’s functions: to recount adventures and to tell about important global occurrences. Why is something that takes place so important, why do we want to find out what happened to the marquise drinking her five o’clock tea? All narration, even if it describes the most commonplace facts, continues the traditions of the grand narratives presented in myths

and explaining the beginning of the world and the origin of man. Interest in narration and the story is an element of human condition and existence in the world. Man wants to find out what people have accomplished and of what they are capable: risk, adventures, assorted trials. Our existence is not that of motionless stones, flowers or insects whose life follows a precisely delineated track. Our existence is an adventure. Man will never cease listening to stories.

Nevertheless, it is also highly characteristic that Eliade was ready to grant special place and significance to film and its capability of bringing us closer to the myth. He gave a determined answer to a question posed by his interlocutor, suggesting that by turning away from the novel avant-garde literature had also rejected something that appears to be an essential element of mankind, and that the myth could have survived in the cinema. Eliade claimed that the cinema preserved the ability to tell myths and to camouflage them not only in the secular but also in areas of degradation and decline. Cinematographic art makes excellent use of the symbol, and even if the latter remains invisible it continues to affect emotions.

The leaning towards neo-mythologism, the process of coming closer to the myth, the attainment by the cinema and film of the dimensions and functions of a myth appear to be part (just as fascinating for the anthropology of culture) of a wider process of contemporary remythisation, described by Gilbert Durand, a researcher studying symbolic imagination and drawing attention to a certain paradox. The same iconoclastic and scientistically oriented civilisation that often mixes demystification and demythisation at the same time proposes a huge demythisation procedure to be carried out on a planetary scale, and with such means at its disposal, which no society has enjoyed throughout the entire history of mankind. It is to André Malraux's great credit that he demonstrated that rapid means of communication, a mass-scale distribution of the masterpieces of art *via* photographs of prints, cinematography, books, colour reproductions, gramophone records, telecommunication and the press, made possible a global confrontation of culture and a gathering of themes, works, and images in some sort of a Museum of the imagination, focused on all symptoms of cultural life. Faced with the enormous activity of a scientific and iconoclastic society, the same society proposes means for restoring equilibrium. The inclination towards neo-mythologism appears to be still topical despite the proclaimed (or actual) crisis of the cinema as an institution, as evidenced at the very least by the film-television version of Brooke's *Mahabharata*, the worldwide success of Kiesłowski's *Decalogue*, and, earlier, the "mythology of Town and World" contained in Fellini's works, the "mythology of childhood" in *Fanny and Alexander* and the whole Bergman *oeuvre*, the

works of Tarkovsky, Pasolini, Paradzhanov, Herzog, Kurosava, Buñuel, Wajda and many others.

The cinema recreates and revives the myth. But there are some areas in which the anthropology of culture and the cinema meet in an equally natural manner. Keep in mind that their beginnings belong to an almost identical epoch (the origin of scientific anthropology is dated differently and spans from 1851 – the publication of *League of the Iroquois* by Morgan, 1877 – his *Ancient Society*, and 1871 - Taylor's *Primitive Culture*, to 1895 – the establishment of "L'Année Sociologique"; its worthwhile recalling within this context that when Bronisław Malinowski was conducting his studies on the Trobriand Islands, Robert Flaherty, known as the father of the documentary film, made his first film in the Far North (1917), while his second film - *Nanook of the North* - originated in 1922, the same year as Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*). These natural connections between anthropology and the cinema, the initial impact exerted by photography on the shaping of anthropology and, in time, the cinema, which today bears fruit in the truly distinct domain of Visual Anthropology, have been vividly outlined by James Clifford in his book *The Predicament of Culture*, discussing ethnography against the backdrop of twentieth-century literature and art, and comparing the title page of the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* with the frontispiece of Father Lafitau's work on the American Indians. The frontispiece of *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains* from 1724 portrays ethnography as a young woman at a writing pulpit surrounded by works of art from the New World, classical Greece and ancient Egypt. She is accompanied by two cherubs assisting her in the task of making comparisons, while a bearded figure representing Time points to a table featuring the ultimate fount of truth flowing from the writer's pen. The image at which the young woman is gazing shows the edge of clouds amidst which there appear Adam, Eve, and the serpent; above, a second human couple – man and woman free of sin and mentioned in the Book of Revelation, flank a radiant triangle carrying the inscribed Hebrew name of Jehovah.

The title page of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* displays a photograph capturing A *Ceremonial Act of the Kula*, with a shell necklace being offered to a Trobriander chief standing in the doorway of his dwelling. Behind the man presenting the necklace there is a row of six young men, bowing and one holding a conch. Shown from the profile they are clearly concentrating on the exchange ritual, an actual event from Melanesian life. A closer look, however, discloses that one of the men is staring at the camera. Clifford proposed the following commentary: the Lafitau allegory seems to be more distant and its author conducted a transcription - he moulded and created. In contrast to Malinowski's photograph, the illustration does not

make any references or evoke ethnographic experience although five years of studies conducted among the Mohawk tribe ensured esteemed rank among field researchers of all generations. The description does not appear to be the outcome of first-hand observation but the result of writing in a cramped study. The title page of *Argonauts* - similarly as all photographs - proves presence and assures about the existence of that, which had been captured by the camera lens; it also suggests a different presence, that of an ethnographer actively composing this particular fragment of Trobriand reality. The Kula exchange ritual - the topic of Malinowski's book - is described with perfect visuality and shown in discernible takes, and the above-mentioned glance of the participant of the ritual draws our attention once again towards the viewpoint of an observer in which we, the readers, co-participate, towards the ethnographer and his camera. Emphasis is placed on the dominating course of contemporary field studies and their authority: *You are there... because I was there.*

There exists yet another feature of anthropology, which in a special manner makes it possible to link it with film. Alongside the specific sensorium of the archaic, the primeval, and the fundamental and that, which is contemporary, anthropology is linked with film the strongest by a penchant and interest for the concrete. An anthropologist reaching for the camera, in various ways dealing with films, and asking: "Why Anthropology of film?" might, just as we could, seek help in Wim Wenders' reply to a questionnaire (*Why do you make films?*). I take the liberty of citing copious fragments:

Ever since this terrible question was put to me, I've done nothing but think of how to answer it. I have one answer in the morning and one at night, one at the editing-table, one when I'm looking at stills of earlier films of mine, another when I'm speaking to my accountant and yet another when I think of the team I've been working with for years now. Every one of these different answers, these reasons for making films, is sincere and genuine, but I keep saying to myself there must be something "more fundamental", some "commitment", or even a "compulsion".

I was twelve years old when I made my very first film, with an 8 mm camera. I stood by a window and filmed the street below, the cars and pedestrians. My father saw me and asked: "What are you doing with your camera?" And I said: "Can't you see? I'm filming the street". "What for?" he asked. I had no answer. Ten or twelve years later, I was making my first short film in 16 mm. A reel of film lasted three minutes. I filmed a crossroads from the sixth floor, without moving the camera until the reel was finished. It didn't occur to me to pull away or stop shooting any earlier. With hindsight, I suppose it would have seemed like sacrilege to me.

Why sacrilege?

I'm no great theorist. I tend not to remember things I've read in books. So I can't give you Béla Balázs's exact words, but they affected me profoundly all the same. He talks about the ability {and the responsibility} of cinema "to show things as they are". And he says cinema can "rescue the existence of things".

That's precisely it.

I have another quote, from Cézanne, where he says: "Things are disappearing. If you want to see anything, you have to hurry".

So back to the awful question: why do I make films? Well, because ... Something happens, you see it happening, you film it as it happens, the camera sees it and records it, and you can look at it again, afterwards. The thing itself may no longer be there, but you can still see it, the fact of its existence hasn't been lost. The act of filming is a heroic act (not always, not often, but sometimes). For a moment, the gradual destruction of the world of appearances is held up. The camera is a weapon against the tragedy of things, against their disappearing. Why make films? Bloody stupid question! (The Logic of Images).

Myth - Literature - Film - Photography - these are the cardinal themes of this issue of "Konteksty". We present essay by Clifford. His study compares two "Polish refugees" (whom he described as the fathers of contemporary anthropological reflection) penetrating a different world and offering dramatic testimony of the confused meeting of representatives of European civilisation and primal culture - Joseph Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*) and Bronisław Malinowski (*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*); in doing so, it deliberates on falsehood and truth in the cultural meaning of those terms, the question of the "saving lie" protecting values and a cohesive image of culture. Clifford also revealed the literary aspects of ethnography creating cultural fictions (it does not mean: that they are untrue) and indicated the great role played by the biographical and subjective element as well as the creative dimension present in scientific work pursued by the anthropologist. The essay by Teresa Rutkowska about Fellini's "journeys" analyses the motif of wandering and the road in his films, interpreted in reference to the deep symbolic structures and stylistic traditions of the Baroque; such "journeys" also provide evidence of an awareness of the absence of the continuum in the contemporary world. Reflections on the symbol and the film (Dariusz Czaja) precede a whole series of analyses tracing the presence of profound symbolic contents in film. The series contains translations (Don Frederickson; T. Jefferson Kline - an excellent example of a psychoanalytical-mythographic analysis perceiving *The Last Tango in Paris* as a contemporary version of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice) accompanied by texts by Polish authors presented at a "Seminar of the anthropology of film" established and conducted by Professor Aleksander Jackiewicz and today contin-

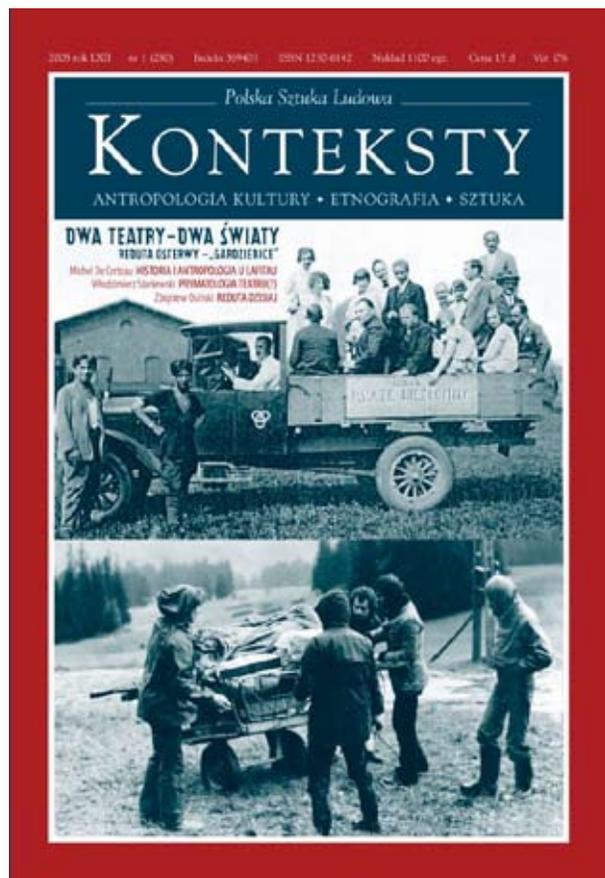
ued by anthropologists of culture at the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Film and Audiovisual Arts – in the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy (i.a. an essay by Wojciech Michera tracking the presence and significance of the alchemical symbolic in works by Herzog; essays on the Don Quixote motif in literature and film, and the cultural-literary-film myth of Venice).

Dzielo a "granica sensu" (The Work and the "Boundary of Meaning") by Wiesław Juszczak, author of a translation into the Polish of stories by Karen Blixen, initiates analyses of *Babette's Feast*. In an essay about the author of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* Janusz Gazda portrayed works and movies by Sergei Parajanov an artist salvaging the memory of the rich cultural tradition from which the film director drew his creative force. Ryszard Ciarka considered the essence of film quests and experiences in reference to the Renaissance aesthetics of *res simulacra*, choosing as the object of his analysis *Innocent Magicians* by Andrzej Wajda and *The Last Day of Summer* by Tadeusz Konwicki. Małgorzata Baranowska discussed the phenomenon of the postcard, and Anna Sobolewska interpreted, *via* the categories of the sacrum, the experience of time and space in *Orchestra*, a video by Zbigniew Rybczyński. A register of culture in contemporary film shaped within the climate of the postmodern game played with cultural texts is another theme.

A separate current consists of fragments of autobiographies, recollections, and excerpts of diaries. We include fragments of an autobiography by Aleksander Jackiewicz, recording his first experiences with the cinema and a further path towards literature, and the anthropology of film. Other texts are parts of *Fotodziennik* (Photo-Journal) kept for years by Anna Bohdziewicz and the autobiography of Józef Szymańczyk, a small-town photographer. A separate pull-out contains a drawing from a sketchbook-diary kept for years by Andrzej Wajda. This time, the author of the memorable film version of *Wesele* (The Wedding), congenial in relation to Wyspiański's play but also a highly auteur work, offered a drawing-note made during a staging of a German-language theatrical version featured at the Salzburg festival. (Only a few of our younger readers are aware that this is not the first time that Andrzej Wajda has appeared in our periodical – he is the author of a documentation of the vanishing world of street photographers. Cf. article *Screens and Backgrounds of Street Photographers* in: "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa" no. 1/1956). The presented issue includes texts on the ethnographic film, focusing on the participation of the creative, subjective element in the production of the ethnographic film and photographic documentation (cf., e.g. a conversation held with Jacek Ołędzki, author of numerous ethnographic studies carried out in Poland, Asia and Africa). All

texts collected in this film-photography issue, dealing more closely either with literature, film or anthropology, come together within the range of joint problems and intentions that could be encompassed by Conrad's formula: *To do justice to the visible world*.*

* This is a preface to a special issue of „Konteksty” (no. 3-4/1992) about the anthropology of film. Naturally, not all mentioned texts were included into the anthology. We maintain the preface in order to to acquaint the reader with the profile of the gathered essays and material. (Cf: *Contents and Summaries*, „Konteksty” no. 3-4/1992).



TERESA RUTKOWSKA

Fellini's Wandering

Art consists in making what is, in fact, artificial appear real.

(Filippo Baldinucci, critic of Baroque art,
in: *The Life of Bernini*)

Ilove movement around. This is certainly the main reason why I make films. To me the cinema is an excuse to make things move (...) I don't like being just a tourist. I don't know how to be one. Rather, I'm a vagabond, curious about everything, entering everywhere, and all the time running the risk of being thrown out by the police (...) I dislike travelling, and am ill at ease on journeys. In Italy I can manage it: curiosity is aroused, I know what there is behind all those faces, voices, places. But when I'm abroad this bores me: I no longer know what anything means, I can no longer make anything out, I feel excluded. All the same, there is always an atmosphere of travel around me. Arrivals and departures, farewells and welcomes. I love movement about me. My friends are my fellow travellers.¹

This is what Fellini wrote in a book that rather being an autobiography is a collection of loose confessions about his creativity, recalling the author's childhood and characterising the people who played an essential part in his life. Fellini returned to moments from the past, of importance from the viewpoint of his later artistic choices, and revealed to the reader and the hypothetical viewer the meanders of his convictions, predominantly artistic and consequently existential and religious. This presentation, however, has nothing in common with exhibitionism. Telling us so much about himself as an artist Fellini simultaneously warned against the illusion that we are becoming familiar with him as a person. Nor did he conceal that over and over again he had imposed successive mystifications, and consistently repeated: *I have invented myself entirely: a childhood, a personality, longings, dreams and memories.*²

Fellini carefully cultivated this fictional self-portrait as evidenced not only by his films but also by the numerous interviews he gave so willingly, various articles, and the above-mentioned book. This image - full of contradictions (*Only fanatics or fools are free of doubt*³) - re-



mains in its way cohesive when we look at it through the prism of successive creative undertakings. A meaningful inclination towards confessions and the construction of one's own likeness for the sake of the public is not a common phenomenon among film directors. We become aware, therefore, more profoundly and distinctly than in any other case just how apt is Fellini's conviction that as a film artist he has been in the course of his whole life making a single long film, while successive titles possess for him, in contrast to the critics and the audience, a purely conventional and technical meaning. Fellini remains one of those artists of the cinema, scarce among contemporary filmmakers, whose *oeuvre* bears such an unusual imprint of personality and individual style. This statement, obvious for everyone who has watched at least some of his films, conceals a great variety of phenomena difficult to distinguish according to the principle of a simple register, and even more difficult to interpret. All attempts at enclosing them within an assumed interpretation scheme are doomed to fail. This is why writing about them we are compelled to concede to fragmentariness. It is quite possible that the most honest solution would be to admit that we treat Fellini's *oeuvre* as a reservoir of problems from which we extract that, which at a given moment appears to be interesting or useful. This holds true also upon this particular occasion.

The motif that we shall render the theme of our reflections does not dominate either from the viewpoint of meaning or structure. It does, however, feature a certain persistent repeatability, which inclines to recognise it as an essential component of Fellini's style. This is the motif of wandering, transition in space. Peregrination became the most universal parabola of human existence, exploited, it would seem, to the limits of possibilities and yet - as in art - it still contains considerable cognitive and aesthetic forces because it expresses man's eternal need, namely, the intensification of contact with surrounding reality and other people.

The space within which we move has a physical, sensually discernible character on par with a psychic one. This psychic aspect of spatial relations has been thoroughly analysed by Georges Matoré in his *L'Espace humain. L'expression de l'espace dans la vie, la pensée et l'art contemporains*: contemporary space resembles man, its recipient. It has assumed the form of a certain historical entity, whose symptom continues to encompass literature, art, institutions and language.⁴

At the crossroads of collective and individual experiences there assumed form in the contemporary civilised world a certain type of space, to which Matoré ascribed the attributes of motion and discontinuity. Man acts (and thus moves and sets things into motion) in an environment that itself remains in constant motion. Motion also marks creation since in accordance with Henri Bergson's interpretation (a view shared by Jean Epstein, a film theorist) form is registered motion. A reflection on this situation contains conceits and metaphors that we use while wishing to express our thoughts and emotions. If this motion of thought has a target, then the latter is mutual communication.

The Cartesian-Newtonian model of the world sanctioned by Eurocentric culture delineated the norms and principles of conduct. This disproportion between individual tension and unrest and the above-mentioned order has been always alleviated by art. How does film fit into his context? Among all the means of artistic expression film appears to be most destined to manifest and generate the feeling of discontinuity in the contemporary world. Film space, as a rule, features heterogeneity and is a succession and sequence of numerous and varied spaces constituted and modified by the camera, which accepts variable points of view and perspective and moves with different speed in all directions. Each of those spaces vanishes in order to make room for a successive one. Their selection and sequence are determined by authors in the course of editing according to certain perception rules and reception conventions as well as an accepted artistic principle. If this course is realized correctly then the viewer does not experience the afore-mentioned variability and succumbs to illusion. The outcome of the above-described operation is the depicted space in which the plot takes place or, as Pierre Francastel described it, three-dimensional diegetic space. In this manner, out of such a spatial mosaic there emerges a certain entity whose characteristic features include a differentiated degree of cohesion or non-cohesion. The problem of artistic space had to be tackled by all coherent theories of film. I mention this because I treat space as an element of reality least resistant *vis a vis* film procedures. Similar creative potential is enrooted in the element of time although it cannot be examined in the film as separate from reality; this does not diminish its role in the holistic structure of the work.

Fellini captured time-space in an absolute and arbitrary manner. It is fascinating to observe how in his suc-

cessive films, from *I Vitelloni* and *La Strada* to *And the Ship Sails On*, *Ginger and Fred*, and even *Intervista* there takes place gradual subjectivisation, how it assumes specific features and succumbs to the voracious visual imagination of the author. Dreams, phantasmagoria, illusion, recollections – the latter most often and in the most ostentatious manner – become part of the course of narration. The past and the future permeate the present since – the artist seems to be saying – the child that we once were and the dreams about our future selves are embedded in different storeys of our consciousness and by coexisting in us determine all our activities.

It could be said that Fellini's films oscillate increasingly distinctly towards thematic structure.⁵ This means that a certain number of elements comprising the main theme (the town of Rome in *Roma*, the process of growing up in *Amarcord*, the creativity crisis in *8 1/2*, the degrading power of television in *Ginger and Fred*) become organized into a chain of sequences (variations on a theme). The criteria of their selection and orderly arrangement are diverse and the decisive ones may include:

- analogies and associations, as in *Roma* (the artist validated this arbitrariness by giving the film the title: *Fellini's Roma*);

- episodic construction of a literary work, as in *Satyricon* (in this case, the pictorial justification of the choice is the content of the frescoes appearing in different sequences);

- reminiscences of youth, due to their very essence fragmentary and incomplete, as in *Amarcord* (with a distinction of points "significant" in the life of the protagonist);

- construction of the interview in *Intervista* (in which responses to consecutive questions gradually fill Fellini's artistic "self-portrait").

The number of such possibilities is endless. The motif of the journey and roaming thus functions in Fellini's *oeuvre* in a dual fashion. Either as an element (more or less clear-cut) of the thematic core (wandering across Italy in *La Strada*, the journey in search for a remedy against the impotence of one of the protagonists in *Satyricon*, the sea trip to the island shores in *And the Ship Sails On*, meandering around the city of dreams - Cinecittà - in *Intervista*, or the obsessive pursuit of erotic experiences in *Casanova*), or else as a construction principle, when wandering consists of transition from image to image, sequence to sequence, and episode to episode. A geometric indicator of this quest is, as a rule, a circle, an ellipse or a labyrinth together with the whole symbolic baggage of those figures.

The construction scheme of wandering is, moreover, intensified by *travelling*, applied with extraordinary predilection. In this fashion, a journey becomes a way of perceiving reality, with the member of the audience invited to take part in the imaginary voyage. His consent to co-participate, however, is an indispensable condition for recep-

tion and in no case guarantees reaching all the meanings even in those cases when we have a guide who—as in *And the Ship Sails On*—speaks to us directly from the screen or—as in *Roma*—addresses us off screen. Fragments registered on the film tape of reality, oneiric scenes, acts of imagination and retrospection—all pass in front of our eyes in linear order. We cannot tell to which we should ascribe the status of truth and in which we should perceive mystification. Apparently, the ultimate solution is unattainable or assorted interpretations are authorised since this mental landscape is by the very nature of things ambivalent. So often non-verbalised ciphers remain unclear, outright esoteric. We are concerned not only with the value of the mystery due to every masterpiece, or the ontological ambiguity of artistic symbolism. We also keep in mind the ultra-personal mythology of the artist, inscribed into the image. The objects, persons, and events comprising it and arranged into visual configurations can be treated as a call number infallibly indicating the author, although their function does not end here. We are dissatisfied with aesthetic contemplation and feel provoked to delve into meanings. Fellini—the demiurge, the creator—builds his film universe, and with each successive film proves that his creative power is growing and becomes unlimited. He thus multiplies the secrets of film “being”. We seek explanations in personal experiences, in our “museum of the imagination”. We follow closely connections and affiliations in order to understand (?), feel (?) and experience (?). This process consists to a great extent of placing the work within tradition, but not in order to deprive it of its independent being but to perceive it in its entire multidimensionality. It is unique but does not exist as an isolated island. It becomes a place for a crossing of multiple paths, one of which leads to Baroque aesthetics. It is one of many but remains highly promising. Not without reason whenever there is mention of the significance of the Baroque in contemporary culture the name of Fellini must appear next to such names as Claudel, Ghelderode, Genet, Gombrowicz and Arrabal.⁶ This is why it seems that we may hazard an analysis of the “eternal theme” of wandering within the context of Baroque tradition. If, however, we speak about Baroque tradition in the case of Fellini then we do so exclusively in such an interpretation as the one proposed by Michał Głowiński: *Tradition is not an emulation of the shapes that phenomena assumed in past epochs but it is the past seen through the eyes of people of the succeeding period, the future actively continued and transformed.*⁷ It is towards a thus comprehended tradition that we turn while seeking a solution for the dilemmas of our epoch. Gerard Genette noticed that contemporary reflection about art applies the Baroque as a mirror, seeing in it also our anxieties, tastes, and experiences, and rendering it a *sui generis* bridge between the present and the past.⁸ This does not take place without a certain reason. After all, it was the Baroque that produced archetypical characters on which twentieth-century mythology con-

centrated: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, and Hamlet, all rebelling against the reality and society that gag them. The heart of the matter does not involve illusory albeit attractive analogies to the situation of the contemporary man by drawing the Baroque away from its social, philosophical and historical roots. Such an approach would be just as barren from the viewpoint of cognition as it would be futile owing to the dissimilarity of the old perception models of time and space as well as different principles of comprehending and expressing causal-effective relations. For this reason, systems of references and associations set into motion while deciphering assorted works can differ in various epochs and cultures. At the same time, some of these elements are deeply enrooted in collective memory while others possess a more fleeting character; some belong to collective experiences while the rest constitute an expression of creative individuality; some are perceived by means of simple references to a sensually tangible reality while the characteristic feature of others is a less or more complicated symbolism. In this manner the status of an artwork is never determined conclusively and certain aspects of its meaning are replaced by new ones. Reference to tradition always takes place upon the basis of selection-schematization from the angle of assumed purposes. If we speak, therefore, about the continuum of culture then we have in mind the fact that an artwork contains both the past and an anticipation of the future.

This thesis is rather paradoxically illustrated by Arnold Hauser in: *The Social History of Art and Literature: The artistic outlook of the baroque is, in a word, cinematic; the incidents represented seem to have been overheard and spied out; every indication that might betray consideration for the beholder is blotted out, everything is presented in apparent accordance with pure chance. The comparative lack of clarity in the presentation is also related to this quality of improvisation. The frequent and often violent overlappings, the excessive differences in the size of objects seen in perspective, the neglect of the directional lines given by the frame of the picture, the incompleteness of the material and the unequal treatment of the motifs are all used intentionally to make it difficult to see the picture as a lucid whole [...] The more cultured, fastidious and intelligently interested in art a public is, the more it demands this intensification of artistic stimuli. But apart from the attraction of the new, the difficult and the complicated, this is once again an attempt to arouse in the beholder the feeling of the inexhaustibility, incomprehensibility and infinity of the representation—a tendency which dominates the whole of baroque art.*⁹ Let us add the emotional striving, omnipresent in Baroque visual arts, towards capturing motion in all of its symptoms, the predilection for trompe-l'oeil, and the ability to obtain astonishing optical effects. The Baroque vision of the world, the product of the imagination of artists and dreamers, finds strong support in precise scientific models devised by the astronomers, physicists, engineers and philosophers of the epoch. Anamorphic and illusionistic painting, *laternae magicae*, theatrical machinery and

stage design applied paradoxes of perspective, the breakdown of space, the phenomena of reflections in lenses and mirrors, the game played by shadow and light. This particular technological factor functioning on the borderline of reality and illusion creates new visual transfigurations endowed with metaphorical dimension and outright cinematic features.

This manner of treating a work of art as a domain of a multi-directional permeation of assorted tendencies and traditions as well as various periods is not a rarity. Today, both literature and other fields of the arts are the scene of meetings much more surprising and paradoxical than the one with which we deal in our reflections.

On the other hand, post-World War II fascination with the Baroque was so conspicuous that some critics were inclined to distinguish it as *barocchus postabellicus*, neo-Baroque or post-Baroque. Actually Baroque inspirations may reveal themselves at assorted levels of an artwork. As a rule, especially in literature, such reference is purely superficial and formal. At times, it involves the use of certain motifs or the exploration of "Baroque" emotional states, intellectual associations, and sensitivity. Their presence in the very tissue of a contemporary work is subjected, naturally, to other philosophical or artistic premises, different styles and outright dissimilar art, but the very ascertainment of this presence exerts a great impact on the reception of the artwork since it outlines a particular context of deciphering the meanings. We could say that in the same artwork or situation of the recipient there exist particular stimuli provoking the use of Baroque rhetoric. A conglomerate of artistic, intellectual, ethical and emotional phenomena encompassed by the term: "Baroque culture" simmers with inner contradictions and tension. The *vanitas vanitatis* motto is accompanied by lush sensuality and violent passion. Man's fate is envisaged as an irresolvable antinomy of body and soul. The tragic perspective of the disintegration and destruction of material leading towards death thus coexists with the cult of life together with all its symptoms. The incessant antagonism between Thanatos and Eros, despair and joy, suffering and laughter, darkness and light, the apotheosis of youth and the fear of physical annihilation, the rent between a vision of paradise lost and the infernal abyss, between heroism and the insignificance of human deeds – these elements are perennially present in the temporal existence of the Baroque man, fully aware of this duality. He thus treats life as a game, an assumption of successive roles and a process of putting on masks. He is an actor in the grand spectacle of the world. Those few whose intellectual predispositions permitted them to assume the position of a spectator – Descartes, Pascal, Spinoza or Leibniz – could, from a distance, find certain regularities in this chaos. Only metaphysics brings order and comfort. States of rapture, ecstasy, and slumber open for a moment the gates of the mystery and restore sense to temporal strife. Omnipresent unrest provoked quests

and the posing of questions. Art of the period reveals the whole diversity of eschatological imagination. The Baroque - as Lichański wrote – *encourages to Travel, to become acquainted with the Universe, is a journey from evil towards goodness, from ignorance towards awareness, from a biological being towards becoming conscious of human vocation.*¹⁰ It is at that precise moment that the metaphor of life as roaming, a pilgrimage, gains an unprecedented distinctness that remains exciting even today.

Those motifs were accompanied by certain formal features distinguished during the nineteenth century in an opposition to Classical art, a feat accomplished by Heinrich Wölfflin in such an apt manner that up to this day his antonym constitutes a point of departure for all reflections about the Baroque. Wölfflin declared that Classicism is linear and visual, while the Baroque is painterly. The Classical vision was cast upon a plane, while the Baroque vision developed inwardly. The Classical composition is static and closed, while the open Baroque composition develops dynamically in all directions and is filled with mobile and active forms. Classical forms tend to lean towards the Earth, while those of a Baroque composition soar upwards.¹¹ Classicism seeks unity – particular elements retain their autonomy but are closely connected with each other within a uniform rhythmic system. The Baroque astounds with its diversity, but all elements of an artwork are co-dependent and together create an effect that cannot be reduced to a sum of constitutive elements. Classicism aims at lucidity, while the Baroque work is ambiguous. Obviously, this highly schematic and general contents-form characteristic of the Baroque has numerous faults. First and foremost, it does not take into account the immense variety of the artistic phenomena, some outright incomparable, that took place at the time. On the other hand, as Jan Białostocki noticed, it renders the Baroque a category much too wide and capacious for it to be useful to an historian of art.¹² For our needs, however, it seems totally satisfactory and justifies the gradual rehabilitation of the Baroque that could be observed for the last half a century after years of rejection.

The predominance of the kinetic factor over the static one, so typical for the Baroque, as well as the discovery of motion, animation, and the fluidity of space once again bring to mind film. Just as the Baroque, according to Hauser, contained an encoded film quality as regards the manner of transmitting the contents, so film, or at least some of its styles, could be described as Baroque. This opinion is shared by Jean Bouquet, an outstanding expert on the Baroque, the film expert Charles Pozzo di Borgo¹³ as well as many other researchers who deal with film from the viewpoint of the history of art and who notice the greatest saturation with Baroque qualities in films by Max Ophüls, Orson Welles and Federico Fellini. The affiliation of the Baroque and film art is demonstrated in an inclination towards gathering curious and astonishing effects, a predilection for opulence, artificiality and illusion,

a deformation of reality so as to reveal its multi-dimensional character, a special fondness for oneiric poetic and, finally, a neo-Heraclitean vision of the world conceived as a non-permanent set of mobile signs. We assume that an artist's set of convictions concerning reality implicates the selection of certain artistic media, the narration structure, and the manner of using the categories of time and space.

Finally, in order to ultimately legitimate our reflections here is a statement made by Jan Białostocki who despite all fundamental doubts concerning attempts at expanding the conceit of the Baroque beyond its epoch wrote:

*Probably the greatest dose of the Baroque can be found in films by Fellini. In his works a special combination of naturalism, expression and dynamic together with deep and intense poetry is disclosed in colourful and lush forms, whose richness irresistibly brings to mind the tradition of the Roman Baroque, so close to this artist.*¹⁴

Presumably, this statement does not pertain solely to the formal aspect of the director's *oeuvre*. The very essence of the Baroque contains a concurrence of the poetic and thematic conception. We thus assume that the Baroque qualities of Fellini's films are not restricted to narrowly comprehended style but reach much deeper and assume an existential dimension. As the earlier cited Genette wrote so movingly: the Baroque existential idea is but intoxication, albeit conscious and, one might dare say, orderly.¹⁵

Fellini declared that in his opinion we are immersed in a decadent epoch that is the end of a certain phase in the development of mankind, a time when principles endowing our existence with meaning are being toppled; nevertheless, this situation did not fill him with horror but offered hope because it promises new life.¹⁶ He believed that decadence is *conditio sine qua non* of renaissance, and lived not awaiting the death of civilisation but joyously anticipating its transformation.

The decadent movement shatters three categories: the category of truth based on the order of logical rationalism, the category of spatial (with a distinctly outlined centre), political, and socio-cultural unity, and the category of purposefulness, comprehended as the existence of a certain eschatological order contrasted with the categories of ambivalence, differentiation and doubt.¹⁷ This is, at the same time, the quintessence of the "Baroque" situation. Such historians of art as Élie Faure or Henri Focillon perceived the Baroque as a closing phase in the evolution of each style whose character is if not eternal (as d'Ors envisaged it) then at least supra-temporal. Fellini matches this tradition of thinking perfectly.

Such symptoms of Baroque qualities appear in his films sufficiently clearly for us to hazard rendering the Baroque tradition an interpretation key to, e.g. an analysis of the spatial structure of Fellini's films, even contrary to the director's demonstrated animosity towards all labels of this sort. Asked outright about his opinion about the

"Baroque roots" attributed to him Fellini snorted: what is not Baroque in contemporary art?¹⁸ Since, however, he did not negate the suggestion categorically we may assume that he regarded himself as a co-participant of this current. It is precisely space, across which the protagonists of his films roam, and in a certain sense Fellini too, as long as he marks his presence, that with the passage of time evolve from quasi-realistic (never realistic) to increasingly conventional, artificial, and invented. Space assumes Baroque traits and its disillusion is undoubtedly an intended undertaking.

Setting things into motion – or the beginning of a journey

In a small seaside town a careless, irresponsible and useless life is being led by a group of friends - good-for-nothings, *i vitelloni*, i.e. perennial bullocks fearing independence. They share an existential situation, a wish to flee the hemmed in small town, and an unwillingness to embark upon any sort of activity that could actually make their wishes come true. Their enclosure is not geographical. The town borders on the sea, still real and magnificent (later it too will become artificial), that the protagonists see as a symbol of a link with the world, a premise of hopes that are to be achieved, an impulse for hazy dreams about the future. The sea is eternal motion, element and energy. A train track also delineates a path towards a better, happier, and more complete existence. This is a real road and thus the only to create the opportunity chosen in the closing sequence by Moraldo. Only he musters sufficient courage to cross the enchanted circle of psychic inertia.

The state of anticipation for something that is to transpire, the awaiting for a paroxysm, an enlightenment that would set free a force capable of transforming existence bring to mind not only Chekhov but also Beckett and Buñuel. We know little about the protagonists but it remains obvious that the source of their feeling of being trapped is to be found in the psyche – they are prisoners of their own device. The world together with its problems follows its course somewhere next to them, without their participation, while they wander aimlessly between a seedy restaurant, a billiard hall, a beach, a theatre, a cinema and their family homes treated only as a source of subsistence and a place for some respite. Night-time roaming along the labyrinths of streets and on the borderline between slumber and vigil, carnival fun that makes it possible to forget one's identity, moments of reflection on the beach – all introduce a special emotional climate conducive for presenting not so much the social-ethical aspect of events as the metaphorical-ethical one. Just as grotesque is the contrast between the aspirations of the protagonists to "levitate" and the trivial, mundane existence from which they carefully eliminate all that could possess any sort of spiritual significance. Attempts at soaring have a pitiful finale. Finally, an angel stolen from a religious-articles shop partly as a form of revenge, partly

out of sheer boredom, becomes the “angel of doom” who shatters the pleasantly unruffled purposelessness.

The narcissistic, infantile egoism of the protagonists does not, however, possess unambiguous moral classification. Fatal for those who remain behind and those dearest to them, it can become a form of salvation for Moraldo planning to escape. Characteristically, nothing in his experience with the exception of a brief meeting with a boy working at a train station foretells the awakening that will take place. The significance of this encounter cannot be interpreted in the categories of a simple causal-effect relationship. The encounter and the conversation between the boy and Moraldo, a brief stereotypical exchange of opinions, appear to be deprived of a sub-text. The boy answers an ordinary question by saying that he is on his way to work and is afraid of being late; in addition, he is excited by the task that he is expected to perform. Nothing else takes place. But the same boy reappears in the finale. Now, it is his turn to ask Moraldo about the destination of his voyage. Moraldo, however, is incapable of answering – it is still much too early. For the time being, the main objective is to leave. The boy becomes a messenger of fate, preparing the protagonist to set off for a journey. Just as in life, we learn what is really important much too late.

Moraldo or someone resembling him will make an appearance in *Dolce Vita*, *8 1/2*, *Roma*, or *Intervista*. Fellini liked to say about himself that he was an eternal, spiritual *vitellone*. He admitted to an affiliation with his protagonists since he too tried to exploit everything that he encountered in life for his own good. This, naturally, pertains predominantly to the sphere of creativity. Fellini used the psychological archetype of the artist in accordance with which he passes through life in the manner of a thief and brings to Cinecittà all that he manages to steal.¹⁹ Years later, in *Amarcord* he returned to the small town of his childhood. But this homecoming to a past even more distant possesses already a perspective entirely different than *I Vitelloni* and in no case is a “remake” of the latter. The young protagonists are still not leaving on a journey but continue being firmly enrooted in family life and that of the small town community. Although their feeling of security inevitably vanishes as adulthood looms they are still capable of dreaming. Here, the quintessence of their dreams is the sea together with an unattainable transatlantic liner – the promise of a great and magnificent world. The sea, enveloped in a hazy mist, is poignantly beautiful and the liner is as enormous as the world and its might so spellbinding that it seems unreal. Is it then an illusion? The whole allure of immaturity, after all, is contained in the fact that one can succumb with impunity to illusions, which in *Amarcord* resemble a metaphysical experience or a state of ecstasy, as in the sequence of getting lost in the mist swathing familiar places or in the scene of a dance performed in front of an empty hotel, with certain features of *danse macabre* evoking phantoms

that long ago became part of the past. Here, the film is an art of setting the past into motion. In the case of Fellini one can never be certain to the end whether that, which took place actually occurred or was only a dream.

La Strada – or light at the end of the tunnel

*We are now living in a kind of dark tunnel of suffering, unable to communicate with one another, but I already feel I can see a glim in the distance, a sense of new freedom; we must try to believe in this possibility of salvation.*²⁰ *La Strada* is in its entirety a parable about roaming. Just as in the Baroque picaresque novel, the journey across the geographic space of Italy in rain, mud, heat and freezing weather is actually spiritual, an individual quest for oneself within an eschatological perspective. Among all of Fellini's films this one has the most concise and closed construction, and starts and ends along the seashore. Here, the sea is encumbered with archetypal meanings, including a symbol of freedom and an opening towards liberty. Gelsomina's farewell to the sea is also addressed to the word of Nature to which she belongs. Entering the path of the wanderer in the company of Zampanò means the acceptance of captivity that will last to the moment when Gelsomina discovers her calling. For the protagonists of the film the journey is a compulsion, a way of winning means to subsist, and they can only move forwards. Along the road, on both its sides, there stretch enormous empty spaces, which just as in *I Vitelloni* reflect the spiritual condition of the given character. Emptiness is of great significance in every Fellini film. In this state of temporal-spatial suspension the protagonists experience their loneliness. The tightly closed, inner world of the human being is an anti-thesis of the empty infinite space depicted in the film. These vacant places belong to intermediate spaces (*Zwischenräume*). Luzius Keller wrote that the term suggests assorted meanings. The spaces are empty predominantly as physical phenomena. They include, however, also borderlands between dream and awakening, where the intellect and the eye still fulfil their normal function but already set off for an unrestrained voyage.²¹

Such roaming, as has been said earlier, takes place also upon the level of consciousness. In *La Strada* the beast and the saint, endlessly inflicting pain on each other, also walk towards each other. In the Pascalian manner they are drastically contrasted and comprise two opposite sides of human nature. Assuming the pose of a tree Gelsomina merges with Nature. Planting along the roadside tomatoes, the fruit of love that she will never see ripen, listening to inner music, isolated from the world by a barrier of silence and starved for emotion she has no chances for establishing understanding with the cruel, strong, degenerate Zampanò, whose life is to a considerable extent reduced to physiological reactions. Contrary to the profound solitude accompanying people in their *peregrinatio vitae* none remains isolated. They constitute

parts of a whole, i.e. the world in its spiritual and material complexity. A network of unclear and unpredictable ties connects everyone and everything.

Gelsomina experiences rapture for the first time when, lost among the participants of a procession, she notices a figure of the Virgin Mary. Then she visits a sick child. An essential function in her spiritual crystallisation is also fulfilled by music. Finally, there is the meeting with Il Matto – the Fool. At the key moment it is he who in a parable about a pebble explains to her that everything that exists has a certain role to play. This tightrope walker, an angel with artificial wings, a carrier of poetry and mystery, suspended between heaven and earth, has a prominent part to perform in the metamorphosis of Gelsomina and Zampanò. During a stopover at a monastery Gelsomina is already capable of verbalising the sense of the task to which she feels a calling, namely, to accompany Zampanò on his way regardless of circumstances. At the end, under the impact of a shock of Il Matto's death caused by Zampanò, her bonds with the real world grow looser. A sacrifice is being made, albeit without the participation of her will and awareness. Now starts the process of changing Zampanò into a human being. When some time later he hears a tune once played by Gelsomina on a trumpet he recalls what actually took place as if under the spell of angelic trumpets. News about her death kindles a moment of revelation. A purifying bath in the sea, liberating cries and tears cause the beast to show a human face. A ray of light illuminates the kneeling man. A sign of grace or simply the glare of the rising Sun? Oscillation, the permeation of reality and metaphysics produce this Baroque image devoid of conflicts, albeit ambivalent and dual.

The world being created

In *Fellini-Satyricon* (1969), featuring stylistic qualities totally different than those of his preceding films, the artist had already achieved complete visual independence. He built ancient Rome by referring to his imagination and historical knowledge. Paradoxically, the literary source was Petronius' *Satyricon libri*, the first realistic novel containing detailed descriptions of Roman customs and sites. It has survived only in fragments and thus the motives and intentions of the protagonists' journey are not quite clear. We only know that they incurred the wrath of Priapus, the phallic god of bountiful harvests, who probably punished Encolpius, one of the protagonists, by causing sexual impotence for which he seeks a remedy. Fellini preserved the episodic construction without undue concern for a logical connection between particular fragments, which means that the film is dominated by an oneiric-astral ambiance. The characters move as if in a dream. The resources of the means of expression they apply are slight, the facial expressions - theatrical and limited, and the lines they exchange are not always understandable, since they use Latin or outright incomprehensible onomatopoeias whose rhythm and sound resemble the

Latin of Cicero. Fellini accepted that the only accessible ancient reality is an idea that we had created upon the basis of its extant fragments. At the same time, he did not want to emulate the stereotype of "Roman qualities". The places where the protagonists: Encolpius, Ascylto and Giton appear are not topographically recognized, but since each episode starts with a detailed, meticulous description such identification does not pose greater difficulties: a theatre, a brothel, a pinacotheca, baths, the temple of Hermaphrodite, a patrician's residence. Not a single historical building, with the exception of *insula Felicles*, a gigantic residential edifice whose description has survived in documents from the epoch. This is one of the most Baroque sequences in Fellini's entire *oeuvre*. The inner walls of the building contain, all the way to the top, cells and caves crammed with human offal. Spiral stairs lead to the abodes and the space in the centre is a monstrous well. The image brings to mind depictions of the Tower of Babel and a series of engravings titled *Carceri d'Invenzione* (The Imaginary Prisons) by Giovanni-Battista Piranesi. This graphic artist and engraver lived in the eighteenth century, but many researchers, such as Marguerite Yourcenar,²² consider him to be a master of the Baroque who, just like Fellini, spent his whole adult life in Rome.

Carceri is a gloomy vision of wooden and stone constructions. A repetitively recurring motif consists of all possible variants of stairs, bridges and spans along which human figures move laboriously and in a state of frenzy. U. Vogt-Göknil wrote that they never rest and always strive at something. Using the remnants of their strength, they stagger along the bridges and climb stairs so as to reach new bridges and new stairs. Tormented by an infinity of possible repetitions they move from one transitory situation to another. Paradoxically, their prison consists of eternal wandering.²³ In *Hamlet*, Rosencrantz declares that the whole world is a prison and Hamlet adds: *A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons.*²⁴ This cosmic dimension of Piranesi's prisons is intensified by the size of the wandering figures, microscopic in proportion to the space they traverse. A truly infernal and evocative vision.

One of the reasons is that this is an image of inferno in the shape of a monstrous crater rendered permanent in European culture by Dante in *The Divine Comedy* or by Michelangelo in *The Last Judgement*. But only filtered through Piranesi's Baroque consciousness did it become universal and appears as the plight of man, his eternal destiny.

In Fellini's film too Hell becomes a reality accessible to human experience and obtains the dimension of a metaphor of life. This image recurs in many films and numerous variants. Sometimes it attains great impetus and its dimensions become outright striking, as in the sequences of feasts, orgies and spectacles in *Satyricon* and *Casanova*, in the scene of an excursion to the bottom of a steamship in *And the Ship Sails On*, and during a television show in

Ginger and Fred. Elsewhere, as in *Il bidone* in the scene of a New Year's Eve ball or in *Juliet of the Spirits* in the scene of a reception, it assumes a smaller-scale character but its distinguishing features include great intensity suffused by a claustrophobic atmosphere. Fellini's films do not have a strict boundary between those three visual spheres – life, Hell and spectacle, which remain in a state of constant permeation.

The episode in *insula Felicles* in *Fellini-Satyricon* possesses a special symbolic dimension due to its distinctive iconographic connotations. The Felicula tenement house soared above Rome in the manner of a skyscraper and was deciphered in those categories already by Tertullian. Writing about the megalomania of the Valentinians, he noted, that they *transformed the universe into a large, furnished apartment house, in whose attics they have planted their god under the tiles* (ad summas tegulas) *and accuses them of "rearing to the sky as many stories as we see in the Insula of Felicula in Rome.*"²⁵ After an earthquake, Hell topples both in Fellini's film and in the Apocalypse. The already homeless protagonists set off into the world, but the "labyrinth experience" will accompany them throughout their wanderings. They roam while feeling that they are being constantly threatened, and despite their common plight they remain dreadfully alone. They traverse lands populated by monsters and freaks. Labyrinths, spirals, ruins and deserts create a *sui generis* psychological reality and are the figures of the human interior. The scene in a villa of suicide victims, suffused with idyllic peace and cheerfulness, contrasts with this background. Such beauty must be annihilated. The cruel laws of the Empire have reached the residents condemned to death. This is the way in which the last bastion of humanity becomes annihilated. When Enclopius finally attains his objective and is cured it turns out that he is now alone. In the closing scene he boards a ship moored along the coast in order to sail to Africa. He will continue the peregrination on his own.

Such a solution would be, however, much too simple. Already an earlier scene in a pinacotheca made us aware that we are dealing with a specific time knot, a paramensia of sorts, when the illusion of *déjà vu* or *déjà vecu* takes place. The frescoes studied by Enclopius feature characters known from previous episodes and recurring on frescoes and mosaics in other fragments and, ultimately, on pieces of walls in the last frame. Did the events really occur or were they a figment of the imagination, and if they did take place, then when? History repeats itself incessantly. Such recurrence and entry into history *à rebours* is the crossing of the Rubicon by school students during an on-the-spot lesson in the opening sequence of *Roma*.

This time Federico Fellini wanders across Rome alone. His roaming is based on the same principle as the one proposed by Jung:

We have to describe and explain a building, the upper storey of which was erected in the nineteenth century; the ground floor dates from the sixteenth century and a careful examina-

*tion of the masonry discloses the fact that it was reconstructed from a dwelling-tower of the eleventh century. In the cellar we discover Roman foundation walls, and under the cellar a filled-in cave in the floor of which stone tools are found and remnants of glacial fauna in the layers below. That would be the sort of picture of our mental structure.*²⁶

Could Fellini have found a better terrain for seeking his identity than Rome? The title: *Fellini's Roma* clearly expresses his intentions. The artist presents a personal vision of the town. The spiral along which he walks is hemming in. He abandons wide spaces and embarks upon a journey to innermost recesses, across successive strata of time; he withdraws and then returns. But time cannot be totally tamed. The gentle coexistence of numerous epochs, with which Fellini so evocatively charms us by applying all the potential of film technology, is mere illusion. The supremacy of the present is an essential feature of our world. Its destructive force is shown in a startling sequence of the disappearance of the frescoes and the disintegration of works of art turning into dust. The destruction is caused by a stream of air invading a buried patrician home through an opening made during the construction of a city subway. Material substance succumbed to annihilation, but an antidote to the feeling of the passage of time could be found in the intensity of experiencing a moment, since it is the sum of such moments that is decisive for the value of human existence. Fellini's *oeuvre* resembles amassed moments of such insight. The majority are an illusion, a mystification revealed increasingly vividly by each consecutive film.

Upon certain occasions this state of ecstatic rapture, one of the prime themes of Baroque painting and sculpture, assumes in Fellini's interpretation the features of derision without losing its mystic aura. This is the case in the closing sequence in *Roma*, with an ecclesiastical fashion show, or the meeting with a medium in *Juliet of the Spirits*.

Roma is the director's first film in which a mixture of the illusion of reality and the reality of illusion fulfils such an essential artistic function. Thanks to this interference there comes into being a special rhythm of the work, a pulsating of sorts. An apogee of oneiric intoxication is followed by a fluent return to existential reality, but the image always retains its ambivalent, hyperbolic properties. In *Roma* the secret of illusion is still preserved. *Totus mundus agit histrionem*, as in the known Baroque motto. The boundaries constantly grow blurred. There is no division between spectators and actors.

A film lacking a traditional plot does not have a traditional protagonist. The wanderer and, at the same time, the *cicerone* is the author, whose commentary guides us through successive spheres. From among the thousand ways of showing the town Fellini selected the one that in certain respects remains connected with the mode in which reality was constructed in previous films. In *Fellini's Roma* the prevailing feature are enclosed places: narrow

lanes, twisting corridors, an old, gloomy palace, subterranean interiors; part of this labyrinth is a highway. The same highway that in American films is a symbol of opening towards infinite space here becomes a substitute of an infernal circle with no exit, crowded to the limits of possibilities. The film ends with a motorcycle cavalcade along streets deep in slumber. Turn after turn, deafening modernity conquers the Eternal City. The artist has one more refuge - Cinecittà, the dream factory, where it is still possible to create a world more genuine than the real one. The expansive present day, however, makes its presence known. In *Intervista* we see clearly how the walls of a concrete housing estate encroach upon the film studio.

As his artistic personality underwent crystallisation Fellini assumed the position of an observer. He was not, however, a moralist, a philosopher or a theoretician of culture. He remained a storyteller, who for the sake of art seized increasingly large domains of reality. With the assistance of the magic media offered by film he transformed the macro-cosmos of the universe into the micro-cosmos of his imagination.

Illusory journey

Had Fellini agreed to pose to a portrait of a Baroque artist he would have probably chosen for his protagonist Don Juan, whose complicated personality reveals the whole profundity of the existential, metaphysical and ethical determinants of rebellion expressed in fervent erotic activity. The Casanova character is totally devoid of such features. Felicien Marceau consistently contrasted the two figures,²⁷ describing Don Juan as a monk of love whose determination and absorption have something of an apostle. This, however, would be an apostle-Antichrist, battling against God and the whole system of values borne by religion. He considers bliss to be a measure for conquering and subjugating the soul. He is interested only in women who are a personification of the ideas that, like columns, support the foundations of social order. He becomes excited by the struggle waged with them, the overcoming of obstacles, and, finally, the spectacular victory won while aware of his dignity and supremacy. Finally, he possesses the strength of a demon. This conception of a protagonist does not match the structure of the film world construed by Fellini. The characters in his films do not gain such a degree of independence. Even director Guido from *8 1/2* is embroiled in a whole network of relations that bind him as much as they constitute him as an artist. While realizing their life message the Fellini characters, concerned with their place in the world, exert an impact on its fate but in a way that is never conscious. They function like cogs in a gigantic mechanism, the homunculi in Piranesi's illustrations. Fellini's films are mobile frescoes, multi-strata paintings.

The artist chose Casanova because the latter harmoniously blends with the image of the world on its way towards annihilation. As a hypocrite and a liar he matches

perfectly the social order of eighteenth-century Italy. It is not his intention to topple any principles. Casanova proves to be a master in arranging situations that permit him to bypass those principles in such a way so that the surrounding would not feel threatened. Don Juan was a great recluse rejected by society, and his outbursts were observed with leniency. He was a perfect technician of sensual love, but his avid climbing to the pinnacles of erotic perfection is by no means heroic. Fellini pitilessly robbed his protagonists of all signs of greatness. In the film, Casanova's existence is subjected to a single purpose - seduction. The objective of his conquests is pleasure treated as a ritual and a duty. Just like time, however, it demonstrates a destructive force. We watch gradual physical and mental deterioration. From the first scenes of the film Fellini portrayed the proximity of eroticism and death, their presence in the theatre of life. The opening sequences take place in Venice, a town branded with the stigmata of death and disintegration, but also the site of orgiastic carnival fun. The film starts with a ceremony of drowning a gigantic skull in the water of the lagoon to mark the commencement of the carnival. Now, it is possible to briefly forget about inevitable destiny. Death, however, is ever present in the narrow streets with mist enveloping canals and mysterious palaces full of nooks and hidden passages.

A feeling of vague menace accompanies the protagonist during his journeys across Europe. This is a strange tour, conducted to flee from oneself and in search of ever-new ways of satisfying an obsession – a journey to nowhere. As Fellini stated ironically: *He has travelled all over the world, but it is as if he never left his bed.*²⁸ Casanova focuses his whole energy on a laborious and mechanical repetition of pursuits whose outcome is always the same sexual act. This routine-like character of activity, stressed by Fellini, discloses the marionette nature of the protagonist. Casanova resembles a puppet steered by a director-puppeteer. Inside the puppet - under the wig, the powder, the rouge and the white caftan - there is nothing, the puppet is empty. Casanova is just as artificial as his latest partner, a mechanical doll. The reality in which he lives is also pretence from beginning to end. In the last frame a stagecoach drives off to the film props room across a plastic lagoon. Lights slowly go out. Fellini – the author of this masquerade – personally reveals the fleeting nature of illusion brought to life.

Hic transit gloria mundi

On the eve of World War I the ship *Gloria N* sets sail on a trip so that the friends and admirers of the famous opera singer Edmea Tetua could in accordance with her last will scatter her ashes near the island of Erimo (E mori?). *And the Ship Sails On* is full of symbols, figures and emblems. Out of their tangle there emerges a vision of the end of a certain epoch, forecasting the downfall of Western civilisation. Here, Fellini discloses fully his Janus-like

face. Janus – one of the oldest Roman deities – was worshipped first as the god of beginnings, steering the creation of deities, the cosmos, people and their deeds;²⁹ then he became the god of all transitions: from the past to the future, from one state to another, from space to space, from vision to vision. Two-faced, he supervises the entrance and the exit, the interior and the exterior, the up and the down. The film world of Fellini is subjected to precisely such control and expresses boundless imperialism.

Entire reality in the story of *And the Ship Sails On* is the product of film technology. An artificial sea created in the studio carries a model of a ship rocked on artificial waves. Over the horizon there stretches an artificial sky, and at the bottom of the steamship there reclines an enormous artificial rhinoceros. In this auto-ironic gesture the author was concerned with revealing film illusion, and just as in *Casanova* he embarked upon this task in the last frame. First, the audience cannot ignore the fact that the reality seen on screen is totally the product of the author's imagination. Second, the metaphorical-symbolic features of the image become considerably intensified once we become aware that each element, even the most strange and amazing, has been introduced purposefully and thus can be, although does not have to, a carrier of some sort of meaning. As a rule, the film image contains alongside presented reality also elements of a reality absorbed by the film naturally and as if by accident. In *And the Ship Sails* this is present only in the physiognomy of the actors, while all the rest is mere imitation and an esoteric magical emulation of Nature. The mystification is highly perverse. The film functions at three time levels. The first sequences – in sepia, as in old photographs or film newsreels – carry us into the past. More, the documentary convention suggests that we are dealing with authentic events reported by an eyewitness. When the time machine is set into motion and the plot starts to develop, the image and the documentary convention assume natural colours. This is the level of the filmed present, by no means uniform and continuous but built of separate episodes albeit not without a certain narration scheme. Finally, after the surprising ending, when it becomes obvious that reality had been created by the author there remains only the reality of the film studio with the exhausted director. Each time stratum is, therefore, absorbed and appropriated by the next one.

The last consequence of the mentioned mystification, the disclosure of the mechanism of illusion, is an interpretation of the artistic vision. The world appears to be a glass globe without an exit. Just as frescoes by Giambattista Tiepolo or Pietro da Cortona create the impression of figures floating towards an endless sky, which ultimately proves to be a beautifully painted ceiling, so in the case of Fellini the infinite space of the ocean and the blue sky are pieces of colourful plastic stretched on scaffolding.

Wandering, sailing is the destiny of man, but it would be futile to expect an explanation of this motion's mean-

ing. Fellini wrote: *Yes, I haven't yet lost faith in the journey, even though it often seems dark and desperate.*³⁰ His belief in art offers uplifting proof. In *And the Ship Sails On* we are dealing with the same pulsating rhythm of narration as in *Roma*. At the same time, as if confirming what had been said, the apogee of ecstasy and intoxication, extremely evocative since it radiates also beyond the screen, comes at those moments when true art is heard. These are the sequences of a Gypsy dance or a spellbinding concert performed with wine glasses in a galley. There comes a time when the whole ship, together with the passengers cultivating their spiritual qualities, explodes. The only creatures left alive are the narrator-journalist and a female rhinoceros, which will provide him with sufficient food. But we must not treat this ending too seriously. If everything is pretence and deceit then final annihilation too does not have to be ultimate.

Intervista is ultimate testimony of Fellini's faith in the journey. The ride in a fantastic blue tram from the centre of Rome to the Cinecittà studios is an opportunity for presenting views concerning the cinema and art in general as well as for a self-analysis of the director's creative and life stand. Memory is the motor force that sets the mechanism of time into motion. Fellini draws attention to the rather essential difference between recollections and memory. In his opinion, reminiscences possess the features of an anecdote, while memory is like breathing – constant, uninterrupted and independent of will³¹. It is also unquestionably the direct reason for his works. In this particular film such a reason for roaming memory is an interview given to a Japanese television crew concerning a film adaptation of Kafka's *Amerika* made in Cinecittà, a decision explained by the fact that Kafka actually never visited America. *Intervista* contains two time spheres: the present and Fellini's youth or, more exactly, his first contact with the cinema and the studio. In the film, however, time has been compressed, while both spheres overlap and in the visual stratum possess an identical distinctness. Only one moment in *Intervista* displays vivid features of the past: the black-and-white scenes from *La Dolce Vita* screened in the "visible" presence of Marcelo Mastroiani and Anita Ekberg, both a quarter of a century older. The spatial structure in this film is perhaps even more complex than in earlier works. There are several journeys, the first being a tram ride. Originally staged, it turns into an imaginary trip across jungles full of wild animals and prairies - entering the world of film. The actors, whom we previously saw putting on their make-up and choosing costumes, now assume their parts and once the tram arrives at the studio they have already become characters from an era half a century earlier. There follows a tour of Cinecittà. These three temporal-spatial levels: real – the present (although also incessantly "falsified" and subjected to modification), the past, and the fantastic-imaginary, function simultaneously within the range of Cinecittà. Action takes place both outside and in the studio, but of all films made by

Fellini in the last years of his life this one is certainly the most "open" towards natural, real space. For the first time for very long, sunlight and rain are employed to fulfil their natural dramatic function. The forces of Nature, however, resist the author and do not succumb to his pressure; they comprise an undesirable obstacle that the Director, the prime protagonist of *Intervista*, must tackle. The essence of Fellini's cinema is the magic of arrangement, "orderly enchantment". Fellini believed in the cinema.

Provocative divulging of film illusion does not annul the magic of Fellini's films just as elementary familiarity with physics does not destroy the magic of the vision evoked in Baroque anamorphoses, whose structure is in certain respects close to that of his works. As we change the vantage point we face increasingly new meanings and mysteries of this dynamic-spatial configuration, fluid and elusive. Their status is always uncertain and ambivalent. We can ignore this aspect, but if we succumb to the impact of ambiguous excess, so typical for Fellini's films, it turns out that one-dimensional reception is insufficient. Although ultimate comprehension consists of a selection of accessible meanings according to our key we are inclined to watch these films once again or outright many times. This procedure, otherwise quite normal and indispensable for someone whose target is analysis, in this concrete case permits more than a relatively precise recognition of the contents of images and the principles of their construction. Recurring symbols and visual connotations remembered in this manner make it possible to perceive Fellini's works as a process. The spatial utopias created by him start to blend to such an extent that each of his works treated as isolated appears to be incomparably poorer than when they are inscribed into a continuum of artistic visions that fit into each other in the manner of Chinese boxes. Each film possesses fragments of previous ones interwoven into its tissue and conceals the embryo of the next film. This principle of inclusion functions upon different levels in order to become realised in a mature creative conception. It attains infinity and appears to be the artist's unique striving towards the absolute in the belief that there is a reason for each thing. It is he, the creator-magician, who sets into motion film reality and commands it to parade in front of our eyes so that a moment later he may in a self-ironic gesture show us its mechanism. The journey is illusion, but the metaphysical component present in each of Fellini's films, even if only for the blink of an eye, opens up domains that evade all control; it appears insignificant that their foundation is composed of a magic trick or optical illusion. The Baroque of Fellini's *oeuvre* is not a hollow ornament - it appears to be embedded in his cosmology.

Endnotes

- ¹ Federico Fellini, *Fellini on Fellini*, London 1976, p. 51, 52-53.
- ² Federico Fellini, op. cit., p. 51.
- ³ Federico Fellini, (interview) "Forum", no. 26, 1987.
- ⁴ Georges Matoré, *L'Espace humain*, Paris 1962, p. 35.
- ⁵ Cf. Gerard Genette on novels by A. Robbe-Grillet, in: *Figure III*, Paris 1966, p. 84.
- ⁶ Cf. Jeanyves Guérin, *Errances dans un archipel introuvable. Notes sur les résurgences baroques au XX s.*, in: *Figures du baroque*, Paris 1983 and *Baroque et cinéma. Etudes cinématographiques*, 1960, fasc. 1-2.
- ⁷ Michał Głowiński, *Tradycja literacka*, in: *Problemy teorii literatury*, Wrocław 1987, p. 342.
- ⁸ Gerard Genette, *Figures I*, Paris 1966, p. 20
- ⁹ Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art: Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque*, vol. 3, Routledge, London 1999, p. 176.
- ¹⁰ Jakub Zdzisław Lichański, *Barok i dzień dzisiejszy*, "Poezja", fasc. 5/6, 1977.
- ¹¹ After: Germain Bazin, in: *Le langage de style*, Paris 1977. Cf. also: Jadwiga Sokolowska, *Spory o barok*, Warszawa 1971.
- ¹² Jan Białostocki, *Barok, styl, epoka, postawa*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki", no. 1, 1958.
- ¹³ Cf. *Baroque et cinéma*, op. cit.
- ¹⁴ Jan Białostocki, *Refleksje nad barokiem*, "Poezja", fasc. 5/6, 1977.
- ¹⁵ Gerard Genette, *Figures I*, op. cit.
- ¹⁶ Federico Fellini, *Fellini on Fellini*, op. cit., p. 157.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, New York 1984.
- ¹⁸ Cited after: Jean-Yves Guérin, op. cit., p. 339.
- ¹⁹ Federico Fellini, (interview) "Le Messenger européen", Paris 1988, fasc. 1.
- ²⁰ Federico Fellini, *Fellini on Fellini*, op. cit., p. 158.
- ²¹ Luzius Keller, *Piranesi czyli mit spiralnych schodów*, "Pamiętnik Literacki", fasc. 1, 1976 (French edition: *Piranesi et les Romantiques français. Le mythe des escaliers en spirale*, J. Corti, Paris 1966).
- ²² Marguerite Yourcenar, *Sous benefice d'inventaire*, Paris 1980.
- ²³ U. Vogt-Göknil, cited after: Luzius Keller, op. cit.
- ²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Tragedy of Hamlet*, Sparklesoup Studios, Irving 2004, p. 39.
- ²⁵ Cited after: Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, transl. E. O. I., George Routledge and sons, London 1943, p. 26.
- ²⁶ Carl Gustaw Jung, *Mind and the Earth*, in: idem, *Contribution to Analytical Psychology*, transl. H. G. and F. Baynes, London 1928, pp. 118-119.
- ²⁷ Felicien Marceau, *Casanova*, Paris 1948.
- ²⁸ Federico Fellini, (interview) "Première", fasc. 12, 1987.
- ²⁹ *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, Paris 1969, p. 427.
- ³⁰ Federico Fellini, *Fellini on Fellini*, op. cit., p. 158.
- ³¹ Federico Fellini, (interview) "Première", fasc. 12, 1987.

Charlie on an Italian Road*

The name of Chaplin is constantly mentioned in connection with Fellini's *La Strada* (1954). Behind the flaxen head of Gelsomina and her face of an old child there emerges Charlie's mournful countenance despite the fact that *La Strada* is not Chaplinesque. On the contrary, it is a polemic with Chaplin.

Charlie and Gelsomina. In both cases, a small figure with a funny gait. A face showing limited expression, with the exception of the twitching eyebrows and evocative eyes. In the first case, the white make-up stresses the expressive eyes, and in the other the eyebrows are painted on together with the make-up of a clown and an equally pale complexion. Charlie displays repeatedly identical make-up and is always a clown or a puppet, but Gelsomina puts on make-up only during her circus performances, and in the manner of Baptiste in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* sometimes wears it after the performance while experiencing problems that are not make-belief or a part learnt by heart. Here, I perceive the first stage of a polemic with Chaplin: Gelsomina is not a puppet or a metaphor and her story is not a contemporary fairy tale.

Further on everything resembles the author of *The Kid*. In his case: a bowler hat, a tight topcoat and baggy trousers, in hers: a well-worn cape or an ill-fitting coat with a moth-eaten fur piece. Gelsomina, just like Charlie, is fond of life. When she is sad she is extremely mournful, but when she is happy she expresses joy with her whole face and body. She carries happiness within. Both are content as long as no one hurts them; when wind or anger cease for a moment and the Sun starts to shine – they immediately start adjusting their pitiful clothes. Charlie rubs his hands gleefully and pats his narrow chest. Gelsomina smooths her flaxen hair, blinks and smiles to herself. Along a wide highway, far from other people, Charlie regains his good mood and his normal gait ends with a joyful leap. Left all alone in a field Gelsomina smells the flowers, stands in front of a scrawny tree and waves her arms to emulate the motion of the bare branches. She wanders in the empty landscape in the manner of a playful puppy and overjoyed listens closely to a resounding telephone pole.

Both are not of this world, although Charlie is a guest and Gelsomina a permanent resident. This difference becomes most conspicuous in the love life of the two characters. Both love lyrically, but Charlie is capable of renouncing emotions and resigning for the sake of a moral; after all, he is part of a fairy tale. Gelsomina's love is difficult, human and tragic. She has nowhere to seek refuge from it and is familiar with only one world.

Charlie's loves are sweet girls from children's textbooks, and his enemies are foolish and strong brutes whom he can easily deceive because reality in Charlie's

films is greatly amended. The land in which Gelsomina lives is modern Italy. The drama of *La Strada* is not a metaphor, as in the case of Charlie; it is real, cruel and irreversible, treated seriously and unfeelingly.

Fellini replaced Charlie's sweet maidens with a Chaplinesque brute, but this is a living brute whom Gelsomina loves; the blows are painful and aimed not at the body of a puppet but at human feelings. Fellini introduced his Charlie not into Chaplin's conventional reality but into the real world. In this film hunger is real and he who feeds the hungry demands to be paid in return. Here, a friend does not render help, but will perish from blows dealt by the stronger. The lifeless, cloudy autumn landscape offers no joy. Winter brings death. It is not true that the processions, the nuns, the wedding, Nature, Gelsomina, Zampanò, and the embittered philosopher "Il Matto" are mere symbols, as some would have it. If *La Strada* were a symbolic film it would not speak to us in such a heartrending manner. *La Strada* is not even Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*, whose conventional and allegorical form is a challenge for good old Charlie. *La Strada* seems to be saying: here is Charlie facing contemporary life, contemporary art, and contemporary philosophy. Here is your lyrical tramp ambling down an Italian road of the mid-twentieth century!

* Aleksander Jackiewicz, *Moja Filmoteka. Kino na świecie*, Warszawa 1983, pp. 30-33.

OBRAZ ZREMASTERYZOWANY

"Ten film jest dowodem na to,
że Fellini to geniusz"

THE INDEPENDENT

"Bezkonkurencyjny"

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

FELLINI **LA**
STRADA

Giulietta
MASINA

Anthony
QUINN

Richard
BASEHART



Thought was born blind, but Thought knows what is seeing.

Fernando Pessoa

The cited brief and concise text by Aleksander Jackiewicz, published some 13 years ago, captures the essence and meaning of *La Strada* and, at the same time, of the whole Fellini oeuvre. By analysing details in several approaches Jackiewicz offered the reader a synthesis, and while referring to the “Charlie and Gelsomina” comparison he warned us against superficial perception. Stressing the similarities and differences he declared: be careful. “Charlie and Gelsomina” – *La Strada* by Fellini. The same cinema, but simultaneously so very different. Thanks to *La Strada* we are at the same spot, along the same road, but further on.

La Strada appears to be a film most resilient and least susceptible to analysis. It is the most “closed”, complete and consistent of the director’s accomplishments, simple and complex, perfect. But not in a manner that would make it possible - slightly twisting Jackiewicz’s reflections - to describe it as a cold film.

I am fully aware that just as there exists a vast literature and myriad analytical and interpretation tracks in reference to Fellini’s entire oeuvre and its particular stages the same could be true in the case of *La Strada*. I used the words: “could be” because in contrast to other films by this great poet and visionary of the cinema in the case of *La Strada* I find them less interesting and they appear to be least necessary.

Is it possible to say something new about *La Strada*?

I do not need to “know” anything about the film. Nor do I require a key.

I prefer to keep my attention focused on the imagery, which has left a deep imprint on my memory. I would rather consider its powerful force, which I experienced seeing it for the first time.

Would such an attitude not be closest to the challenge made by the director himself, about whom (citing Dante) Cardinal Silvestrini wrote that in the first song of *Paradise* the poet says: «*To soar beyond the human cannot be described in words. Let the example be enough to one for whom grace holds this experience in store*». *Transhumanation denotes transcending that, which is human. Federico sought, examined, and followed this invisible dimension, which he conjectured in man, claiming that nothing is known and everything is imagined. Woe to those who wish to understand – one must merely listen.*¹

*

Such an approach is not concerned with exclusiveness. In this respect – I am well aware – I share the same experience with other authors writing about Fellini. Each has his “own” Fellini, his “own” *La Strada*.

ZBIGNIEW
BENEDYKTOWICZ

Road Movie – a Poem about the Pebble

To Piotr Skrzynecki

This is why apart from Jackiewicz I shall refer to only several texts published in “Kwartalnik Filmowy”, rendering them the prime point of reference. Already a comparison of those opinions would require the introduction of an amendment. It turns out that this particular film, which we would be inclined to describe as “closed” and complete, remains, and actually is, open and incomplete. The number of interpretations depends on the number of their authors.

La Strada is not a mere metaphor or a fairy tale:

The lifeless, cloudy autumn landscape offers no joy. Winter brings death. It is not true that the processions, nuns, wedding, Nature, Geslomina, the embittered philosopher “Il Matto” are mere symbols, as some would have it. (...)

This is a real, cruel and irreversible drama, treated quite seriously and unfeelingly. (A. Jackiewicz)

Petr Král² called Fellini the greatest showman among poets and the most poetic author among showmen. He stressed the entropic character of Fellini’s imagination and film narration while taking as a point of departure the spectacle, and in particular the type of spectacle produced by the American cinema, and then referring to the specific, i.e. European spectacular qualities of films by the author of *La Strada*, enhanced with the experiences of aesthetic and cultural tradition. (A Fellini spectacle differs from loud show business and the smooth, cold American show due to the fact that alongside the presence of this cultural memory, referring to centuries of images, visions, and symbolic depictions it resonates with extraordinary force with sounds and images borrowed from the artist’s *most personal treasury*. The prominent elements of Fellini’s film stories are also European individualism and subjectivity. Importance is attached, especially in the case of this sort of entropic narration, to marginal images (the role of the backstage) alongside the *personal treasury*. From this point of view – not surprisingly – an evaluation of *La Strada* turns out to be not the best (although, contrary to Jackiewicz, it reveals its “passionate” aspect):



the master of observation, embedded in Fellini, differs not only from the showman – he is also no ordinary teller of stories. The majority of this director's films in which the most important is the story and the scenario becomes, in the American mode, the very axis of the film and includes alongside his "manneristic works" also those regarded as inferior in the Fellini oeuvre: the tearful psychologism of *La Strada* (1954) is by no means more convincing than the linear character of *Orchestra Rehearsal* (1978) or *And the Ship Sails On* (1983).³

Finally, a third opinion, that of Andrzej Werner⁴, who warns us against an a-intellectual (refusing to use the intellect) or unthinking, stereotypical reception and perception of Fellini's work:

In this way, there emerged a legend about a charming and brilliant primitive who fell in love with everyone and must be loved by all in return. Extremely useful proved to be the kindly donnish – and otherwise useful – tendency towards referring the object of the analyses to a context characteristic only for him. To his birthplace, the folk culture within whose range he grew up, or the circus which he visited to remain once and for all within the limits of its arena.

A little boy in the middle of the arena, standing in the spotlight together with the creatures dancing around him - the products of his imagination and love, and the bane of his future life. Who does not remember the closing frame of 8 1/2, who does not recall Gelsomina and

Zampanó, that innumerable procession of musicians, acrobats, clowns, strongmen without whom Fellini would not be himself. Now, let us add friends from his hometown of Rimini, Gradiska, third-rate whores from the suburbs of Rome, all those failed actors, singers and dancers ... and we have a complete portrait: the type of culture in which he grew up, to which he was attached, the protagonists of an ensuing beautiful and poignant story. He stands in the middle, already grownup, a magus, a great magician, intuitive, emotional – the opposite of the scientific mind. Asa Nisi Masa.

*After all, such an approach is feasible. It probably contains a great amount of truth that will always remain inaccessible for me. For all practical purposes I am arguing about the manner in which art is seen, the contact with it. One can relegate all problems or even see them clearly, but they still do not seem to pertain to me.*⁵

Comparing those several opinions one could ask: is *La Strada* a cold film? , "passionate"?, emotional? (tearful), realistic? A commonplace (linear) story? Is this a film that can be interpreted and examined in a closer or more distant context? A psychological film: a story about concrete people? Or a symbolic film, concealing under the outer realistic stratum something more? A film about transhumanation, the process of transcending beyond that, which is human? A film that seeks, studies and follows the invisible dimension foretold in man...?

Important questions. It would be absurd, however, to propose a single answer and to recognize that only it is correct and genuine. Each of those statements, in my opinion, contains some sort of an essential, partial truth about *La Strada*. All show just how ambiguous this film, ever evading our divisions into that, which is veristic, psychological, and symbolic, actually is. In this respect, *La Strada*, an ambiguous film or one with many meanings, can be an excellent example of concurrence between the nature of film and the symbol, as described by Heinz Politzer, maintaining that the significance of the symbol consists of a capability of crossing its limits. It is a sign both secret and visible, proclaiming a general truth; the possibilities of commenting on the latter are just as great as the number of its interpreters. *Quot capita, tot explicationes*. This is true symbolism, Goethe declared in: *Maximen und Reflexionen über Literatur und Ethik, where the particular represents the general, not as dream and shadow, but as a live and immediate revelation of the unfathomable*⁶.

In this respect, *La Strada* as a symbol combining assorted spheres of experience and levels of reference in its capacity as a living momentary revelation of the unexamined, accessible both to “simpletons” and intellectual giants.

It is as a symbol⁷ uniting the individual, concrete, sensual, emotional and historical with the supra-temporal, abstract, and intellectual that *La Strada* speaks to us in a particularly visceral manner.

One has to ask the poets why the world is suffering (David M. Turolto⁸).

In *La Strada* we find ourselves in the very centre of that question. It would be difficult to pretend that it does not concern us.

*

La Strada is a fundamental structure of Fellini’s entire oeuvre, a milestone along the path of the development of his artistic vision and film. In *La Strada* we remain at the very source of all the images of the director’s cinematic accomplishments and come across all his past and future imagery (a foretaste of future films). One could classify and name the images in a purely scientific manner as: antecedent, precedent and “first”, forecasting future continuations and developments, as well as distinguish the domain of the unique ones.

Let us concentrate on a single example: the sea. The sea appears and is present throughout *I Vitelloni* and subsequently in many other films, all the way to *Casanova*, where it is most artificial (the almost rustling waves are made of black plastic) but, paradoxically, moving and true. Nowhere, however, was it present with such poignant and startling force as at the beginning and end of *La Strada*, particularly in the finale. The same holds true for other images: the road, distant places passed along the way, suburbs, and towns. In

La Strada we find ourselves in precisely such a suburb, but it turns out that actually “we are in Rome” before *Rome came into being*, as if before *ab urbe condita*, prior to the construction and development of the whole image of the town. In *La Strada* – (Rome is an excellent example) – presence that becomes voluble *via* absence is particularly poignant. This is the absence of someone or something. We are as if afore time or at the beginning of time, in a concrete place and outside it, on our way, down a road (before, as in *Roma*, we find ourselves in a traffic jam on a highway). The same applies to other images, motifs, and characters.

The precedence is Gelsomina, but do her sensitivity, simplicity, naiveté, surprise at the world, need of love (take the scene of imitating a tree, her dancing gait, her solitary dance in a deserted location) not bring to mind – though I realize that this is an inappropriate expression so let me put it differently: are they not a foretaste of another solitary dance, performed in the mist, “in the dead season” in *Amarcord* (young men pretending to be dancing with female partners). *Gelsomina* ... – do we not find her, albeit in a different costume (no longer rags) and wearing a magnificent turban (what wonderful hats!), busy cultivating her flowers: in other words, do we not discover her in *Giuletta* finding out about her husband’s infidelities in “manneristic” *Juliet and the Spirits*? Two scenes: does Gelsomina, led to a sick child, and *Giuletta*, led to a seer-hermaphrodite, not perceive the world with the same fear and astonishment? “*Giuletta and Gelsomina. Who has not sat before his own heart’s curtain?* (Rilke⁹). What about *Ginger and Fred*? Although thanks to Jackiewicz we already know how illusory external similarities can be (Charlie and Gelsomina) in this case we do not have to be excessively cautious¹⁰. We are on the same path, but much further on. *Gelsomina, Gelsomina*.

The texts about *La Strada* known to me are dominated by an approach interpreting the film from the viewpoint of familiarity with the completed Fellini oeuvre. Teresa Rutkowska wrote:

*La Strada is in its entirety a parable about roaming. As in the Baroque novela picaresca the journey across the geographical space of Italy in rain, mud, heat and frost is actually a spiritual journey, an individual quest for oneself in an eschatological perspective*¹¹. Jacek Trznadel¹² drew attention to the presence in *La Strada* of even older forms: the *commedia dell’arte* (after all, the nickname “Rifle” given to Zampanò comes from a scene enacted by him together with Gelsomina and announced as *the newest farce*; the *commedia dell’arte* is thus distinctly cited), references to the late mediaeval morality play, *theatrum mundi*.

But even interpreted and deciphered *via* the Baroque *La Strada* does not possess a Baroque nature. This is a film that is almost ascetic and crude, especial-

ly in comparison with Fellini's later works. *La Strada* is deeply immersed in its contemporaneity but takes place, as we have said, beyond time, as if prior to time. We find ourselves at a crossroads of time, somewhere between realism or, as historians of the cinema are in the habit of saying, Italian neorealism and its later vision. Its symbolic, one would be inclined to declare, is much more natural, organic.

In *La Strada*, just as in a grain of sand¹³, we can see the whole Cosmos registered "earlier" and "later" in Fellini's works.

*

La Strada is a road movie about people of the road, migratory birds - *le gens du voyage*¹⁴. This is a film about Artists. Who can forget the magnificent imagery from *La Strada*: the scene of the calling, when we see Gelsomina running out from behind a dune against the backdrop of reeds waving in the wind, rushing further along a beach towards the sea. Faster, faster! She is accompanied by a crowd of intrigued children, urging her on. The joy of the calling is accompanied by news about the death of her older sister. Pain becomes combined with joy. Gelsomina must make decisions "all alone", although everything seems to have been resolved and settled without her. She is uncertain, does not know what to do, and wavers. After all, the money obtained from selling her will provide food for the children. From the very first scene we witness uncertainty, ambiguity, a mixture of sadness and joy, farewells, partings and facing the unknown, the different, the new, that, which is ahead of us and will accompany us constantly along this path.

Yes, the world depicted in *La Strada* is cruel, but who can forget the happiness with which Gelsomina hurries to inform her neighbours that she will become an artiste?

Who can forget Zampanó! That ritual announcement, bursting with pride: *Zampanó e arrivato!*, a proclamation of something that we shall witness in a moment, something unusual and grand but also, at times, painfully ironic and comical, combined with a curious home-vehicle (*a real American Davidson*) and that, which we shall see in a minute... (*Whenever I see him I have to tease him* – says "The Fool"). Who does not recall that tragic image in which Zampanó, having found out about Gelsomina's death, now all alone, head bent low, walks around the circus arena announcing his act in a guttural voice totally at odds with his part.

I know of no more genuine and moving scene of drunkenness than the one from *La Strada*, with Zampanó causing a fight, being thrown out of a bar, fighting with his own shadow (we can only imagine what he is experiencing). Perhaps a similar image could be encountered only in literature – e.g. in *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry, where in the deep recesses of

a bar one of the intoxicated customers keeps on repeating: *Mozart was the man who wrote the Bible.*

*

La Strada – a road movie, about people of the road, itinerant artists.

But who are they, tell me, these Travellers, even more transient than we are ourselves, urgently, from their earliest days,

*wring out for whom – to please whom,
by a never-satisfied will? Yet it wrings them,
bends them, twists them, and swings them,
throws them, and catches them again: as if from oiled
more slippery air, so they land*

*on the threadbare carpet, worn by their continual
leaping, this carpet
lost in the universe.*

*Stuck on like a plaster, as if the suburban
sky had wounded the earth there.*

*And scarcely there,
upright, there and revealed: the great
capital letter of Being.....and already the ever-re-
turning*

*grasp wrings the strongest of men again, in jest,
as King August the Strong would crush
a tin plate (...). [Rilke¹⁵]*

People of the road.

Zampanó. Where do you come from? Gelsomina asks him. *Zampanó: From my part of the country.*

Gelsomina: Where were you born?

Zampanó: In my father's house.

Once "The Fool" finds out from Gelsomina that after a brawl there is no longer any place for him or Zampanó at the circus he declares:

- I have no home and no roots... And nobody will care.

- And your mother?

- ... What will you do? Are you staying or are you going?

La Strada is a register not only of Fellini's future films – that symbolic fleeting figure of Zampanó is the black clad motorcycle rider who crosses a small town in *Amarcord* to vanish in the distant darkness. The landscapes, small towns, suburbs, and roads swallowed up by Zampanó's strange vehicle divulge also the future American road movie. Are the protagonists from *Easy Rider* and *Scarecrow* not Zampanó's distant American cousins?

La Strada, a film about people on the move, is a record of much more. This holds particularly true for the artists. Those in *La Strada* are unique. In the first encounter between Gelsomina and Il Matto ("The Fool") after her departure or rather escape from Zampanó she notices the acrobat high overhead, a high-wire artist with the wings of an angel walking on a tightrope suspended between houses in the very centre

of a town, not somewhere in the suburbs. We too see him – this is high, sophisticated art. He even invites the spectators to join him for supper while in the air... Can there be any comparison between Il Matto and Zampanó? It would resemble a comparison between Heaven and Earth. What a crowded audience fills the street! Suffice to look – lights, spotlights, a beautiful and elegant woman dressed in a black dress with jets glistening in the spotlight and with a coat draped across her shoulders announces the show. After the performance “The Fool” seeks refuge in a car from the enthusiastic crowd, his adoring audience. Separated by a windowpane he glances at Gelsomina staring at him. Is any sort of a comparison possible: the artist’s car and the dress decorated with jets, on the one hand, and the pitiful vehicle used by Zampanó and Gelsomina’s cape, on the other. (True, we shall later see how much pretence and pretentiousness there is – “The Fool” will attempt to find out whether he is still permitted to work at the circus – and that reality is quite different. But then such is the fate of the artist: one day at the top, the other - at rock bottom).

Upon numerous occasions¹⁶ emphasis has been placed on *La Strada*’s connections with *commedia dell’arte*, Baroque forms, and *theatrum mundi* together with their characteristic principle: the performance of social types – stock characters. As long as drama originates from the unity of life and remains «*sacer ludus*» it portrays the motion not of individuals but types, the ideal representatives of the motion of life (Gerardus van der Leeuw¹⁷). In order to illustrate the presence of this principle in Fellini’s *Ginger and Fred* Jacek Trznadel cited typology borrowed from Cervantes:

Come, tell me, hast thou not seen a play acted in which kings, emperors, pontiffs, knights, ladies, and divers other personages were introduced? One plays the villain, another the knave, this one the merchant, that the soldier, one the sharp-witted fool, another the foolish lover; and when the play is over, and they have put off the dresses they wore in it, all the actors become equal.

Yes, I have seen that, said Sancho.

Well then, said Don Quixote, the same thing happens in the comedy and life of this world, where some play emperors, others popes, and, in short, all the characters that can be brought into a play; but when it is over, that is to say when life ends, death strips them all of the garments that distinguish one from the other, and all are equal in the grave.

A fine comparison! said Sancho; though not so new but that I have heard it many and many a time...¹⁸

Naturally, we could search for such *tipi fissi* in *La Strada*, a form much more ascetic and closer to the *commedia dell’arte*, had it not been for the problem accompanying us from the very onset, namely, that whatever we would like to say it constantly evades us and leads us further on. But let us once again take a closer



look. It is possible to seek in “The Fool” and Zampanó two types of harlequins, who appeared on circus arenas during the 1870s – the so-called white clown: *carefully dressed, witty, and making refined jokes, and his partner, the so-called foolish Auguste: simple-minded, dull, naive, and humble, who allows himself to be dominated by the tyrannical white clown*¹⁹. Straight away, however, it becomes obvious that nothing matches. “The Fool” could be the white clown but the dim-witted “animal”, “beast” Zampanó (Auguste?!) is not really so foolish, not to mention humble and simple-minded. Perhaps the Zampanó–Gelsomina couple? Just as impossible. Black Zampanó cannot be the white clown. The protagonists of *La Strada* outgrow the costumes of typical *dramatis personae* and one would like to say that they are living people and not marionettes. In the case of *La Strada*, therefore, we may speak about the presence of those forms only within a certain frame. The principle, on the other hand, would consist of the image constantly transcending that frame.

In other words, the most often and best applied is not the principle of the game played with social types but another, highly characteristic for the *commedia dell’arte*, namely, the coexistence and co-appearance of *parti gravi* and *parti ridicoli*. The score of *La Strada* is written with laughter and gravity, the best example being the significant and outright breakthrough conversation held by “The Fool” and Gelsomina. Prior to the “serious part”, i.e. “the parable of the pebble” Il Matto teases Gelsomina; leaping from place to place, wriggling, almost dancing or performing his dance in front of her, doubled over with laughter, he derides and makes fun of Gelsomina:

– What a funny face you have. Are you sure you’re a woman? You look more like an artichoke. (...). But how did you end up with him?

– He gave 10 00 lire to my mother.

– That much?! ... I wouldn’t keep you a single day.

Later, when the serious scene, *parti gravi*, the conversation about the pebble, subsides to total silence Gelsomina takes over and starts speaking like a “true”

woman and “wife”, causing “The Fool’s” even greater, authentic (tinged with a note of admiration) laughter.

One of these days, I'll take a match and set fire to everything. Mattresses, blankets, everything. That'll show him. I never refused to go with him. He paid 10 000 lire. I do my work and he hits me. That's not right. He doesn't think. I tell him, and what does he do? What good does it do? I'll put poison in his soup too. I'll set fire to it all! All! If I don't stay with him, who will?

Just like *commedia dell'arte*, *La Strada*, composed of *parti gravi* and *parti ridicoli*, contains a brilliant synoptic of that, which is human²⁰ but without actually being *commedia dell'arte*. In *La Strada* and its protagonists, itinerant circus artists and masked clowns: the rough-hewn Zampanó, the “The Fool” as garrulous as Capitano, and the fragile Gelsomina, we may recognise only *commedia*'s essential features, bare outlines of the characters described synthetically by van der Leeuw.

Maschere are predominantly zanni, known under a variety of names: Arlecchino, Truffaldino, Pasquino, Scapino, Pierrot, Punch, Hanswurst, and Jan Klassen. Regardless of their names they belong to two types: intelligent and sprightly (Figaro) or a foolish sluggard. Then there is Pantalone, angry and grumbling. The plot involves love scenes, petty intrigues, feigned pedantry and, above all, numerous brawls - quite an apt synopsis of human life. The simpleton, bearing a common name, is funny but receives lashes. Frequently, it seems that the whole world is composed only of those who deal blows and those who receive them. Within this small world everything is constant: Capitano always babbles. Apparently, habits and characteristic traits belong to people due to their ranks: the fool, the glutton, the miser, the harlot, the nurse, the cuckold, the young lover – all are defined solely by their name. Customs and attributes, deeds, thoughts and emotions hang on us in the manner of clothes. The actor does not play the role of a person but the part of a role²¹.

It would be difficult, however, to speak in this way about the protagonists and actors of *La Strada*. The former constantly oscillate between the model-like characters of the *commedia dell'arte* while remaining human and continually revealing some unexpected trait of their personality.

Who are Zampanó, “The Fool”, and Gelsomina?

In *La Strada*, a film about artists, the latter are not equals. Suffice to compare “The Fool” and Zampanó. Can they be likened? “The Fool” – an Artist, ethereal, sophisticated, a dancing tightrope walker. Zampanó - unsteady on his feet once he becomes drunk, impetuous, ready to start a fight, a brawny strongman.

In *La Strada* – in contrast to Cervantes' *theatrum mundi* – once the comedy comes to an end and everyone takes off his costume the actors are by no means alike.

The art represented by Il Matto is celestial, refined, full of lightness and talent. The art of the other is suffused with effort and powerful, the sort that calls for an announcement addressed to the spectators: *If there are any squeamish people in the audience I advise them not to look.*

In *La Strada* the blows were painful and aimed not at the body of a puppet but at human feelings.

In *La Strada* – once again by way of contrast to Cervantes' *theatrum mundi* – not everyone descends into a grave, and if death does remove the costumes that differentiate them not all will go into a grave identical and in the same way.

Fellini enclosed a psychologically penetrating and all too human depiction of the artists' life and milieu. Artists are not equal but perennially compete. “The Fool”- imaginative, talented and well aware of his flair, must at every step of the way demonstrate superiority over Zampanó and point out the latter's frailties and the inferiority of his art; he is unable to walk past without ridiculing and constantly provoking. He tries to steal Zampanó's partner, Gelsomina, who is not worth five cents in his opinion but whom he would readily include into his stage performance. On the other hand, despite petty intrigues, Signor Giraffa, the owner of the circus, is right when he says that all artists form a single family. After all, it is “The Fool”, unable to unravel why Zampanó keeps Gelsomina at his side, who shows her true vocation and the reason for remaining on the road with him: *He told me to stay with you.* *La Strada* portrays the complicated world of artists: *We're all one big family here, we all work together ...*

In the conflict between the regal, proud Zampanó who strenuously and with toil works for the sake of his art and celebrates it, and who respects inner hierarchy and the hierarchy of the world (while regarding Il Matto as a *tramp*, *the bastard son of a gypsy*), and the constantly provocative, light-hearted, surprising, full of fantasy, talent and lightness “Fool”, to whom art comes so easily, we can recognise a clash involving two other artists. *Toutes proportions gardées*, Zampanó and Il Matto are the Salieri and Mozart of the art of the circus.

La Strada is a record not only of Fellini's entire oeuvre, his forthcoming works, and the American road movie of the future, but also of visions and themes embarked upon and subsequently developed by masters of world cinema. *La Strada* contains a discernible forecast of images, a seed planted once and for all, a base for all future films about artists, a prognosis of *Amadeus* by Milos Forman²² and *Babette's Feast* by Gabriel Axel after Karen Blixen²³. Who can forget a meeting in *La Strada*, brimming with mutual respect, tact, and fascination and involving two, ostensibly competing paths: *via activa* and *via contemplativa*, the encounter of a nun and an itinerant Artiste (a meeting of reli-

gion and art) who recognized in each other the two evangelical sisters: Mary and Martha²⁴. Who can forget that gaze with which the nun and Gelsomina look at each other, discovering in it (for us and in front of us, the spectators) the deepest possible community shared by them [nun to Gelsomina]: *You follow your bridegroom, I follow mine.*

La Strada also has a scene in which we descend into the innermost recesses of time, beyond the Baroque image of *theatrum mundi*, *commedia dell'arte*, and the mediaeval morality play, a scene in which they can be of no further use and render no further assistance. In order to arrive at this scene we must first climb upwards, bypassing the overlapping and mutually permeating images of monumental Nature with its eternal majesty, as if we were descending to the roots of time, beginnings close to the creation of the world (*genesis*), seeing on the way a lake encircled by mountains, and then, right around the corner, driving down into a gentle valley with three trees in order to notice, oh, we have just passed it: a wrecked car - "The Fool's" defeat. Now we have to stop and turn off the engine so that it would stop rattling and total silence could reign... This is a scene in which the music by Nino Rota comes to a complete standstill – it has been accompanying us along the way, frenzied, captivating, pushing us forward, unwinding

the surface of the road before us: a ribbon composed of swallowed-up images, appearing and vanishing, passed in front, in the back, and on the sides. In this scene the music comes to a standstill as do all *parti ridicoli* and *parti gravi*, and even the most delicate tone vanishes so that we could experience silence and terror from centuries bygone despite the birdsong and scenery straight out of paradise. In *La Strada* Fellini recorded this image and guided us toward it. A terrifying image: the fratricide of an artist (as if there was not enough room in the world for both, as if they could not live alongside each other under the same Sun). Fellini lets us know that watching the story of Zampanó and "The Fool" we are taking part in the story of Cain and Abel²⁵.

In *La Strada* Fellini wrote the Bible.

Just as in the Writ, so here too we see and witness jealousy, fervent competition, wounded pride, and humiliation, revenge, *teaching him a lesson*. We shall watch the undeserved *death of the Innocent*. By accident? We shall see Zampanó's pure, biological, "animal"-human fear portrayed with complete realism. The terrifying *fear of man*, fear of punishment. (From that moment: *A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be upon the earth!* / Genesis 4,12/). Loneliness, Escape. We observe realistically described, incomprehensible death that can be never understood or appre-





hended with the mind, unnoticed death, of which we are still unaware, death that will arrive in a moment: – *Hey, you broke my watch!*, death with which we cannot come to terms to the very end, which we cannot believe (*Come on, get up - don't act like a clown!*), the “foolish” death of an artist, an actor, a clown. In the *La Strada* scene of Il Matto’s death the experience of death has been recorded with the entire realism and force of the image:

*We know nothing of this going away, that shares nothing with us. We have no reason, whether astonishment and love or hate, to display Death, whom a fantastic mask of tragic lament astonishingly disfigures. Now the world is still full of roles which we play as long as we make sure, that, like it or not, Death plays, too, although he does not please us. But when you left, a strip of reality broke upon the stage through the very opening through which you vanished: Green, true green, true sunshine, true forest. [...]*²⁶

*

[On the margin:] Despite its entropic imagination disintegrating into as if independent images *La Strada* has an uncommonly precise construction and narration. On the one hand, even if something appears and becomes established we cannot be certain that this is the way things are going to be. Take the example of the afore-mentioned automobile belonging to “The Fool”, perceived and described as a status symbol of his superiority – as if it could be the object of envy! – that breaks down and becomes the direct cause of his death. It is outright strange and inconceivable that Zampanó’s rickety contraption does not stop working even once in the film. On the other hand, despite the fact that *La Strada* seems to be governed by cast iron rules taken straight out of Chekhov’s drama, and that we should know right from the beginning that if a gun appears then we can be certain that it will be fired, it turns out to be just as inconceivable that right to the finale we shall be shocked, startled, and taken by

surprise. This holds true for the construction of the film, its structure and dramaturgy – in *La Strada* Fellini had written the Bible of the cinema.

*

One has to ask the poets why the world is suffering.

In *La Strada* we find ourselves in the very centre of that question.

This is why if one were to seek some sort of a counterpart of the film – a film about artists in which the latter, having cast off their costumes, do not remain equal nor when after death tears off their costumes they do not all descend into the grave identical – then much closer than Cervante’s *theatrum mundi* would be another fragment of the global theatre: that from *El gran teatro del mundo* by Calderon, evoked by Carlos Saura in his film: *Elisa, My Life*. This fragment appears in Saura’s film as a school spectacle performed by little girls and allows, urges, and helps us to think of a poor girl surrounded by children and somehow a child herself (*Are you sure you’re a woman?*), abandoned by us. Poor Gelsomina, left in deserted ruins at the edge of some road:

[Girl WORLD] *Come, mortals, come! Prepare for the World Theater Performance. Speak, Supreme Maker.*

[Girl AUTHOR] *If man could choose, none would ever choose pain. All would choose a role of power unaware that it is only a role. They believe it is life. Supreme Maker, know which role suits you. Paquita, thou shalt be King.*

[Girl KING] *I as King shall govern and be worshipped. Give me your gold.*

[Girl WORLD] *Why gold?*

[Girl KING] *Such is my role.*

[Girl AUTHOR] *The Fair Maiden of Beauty will be Conchi.*

[Girl LADY] *Great is my joy! I am Beauty itself! Give me jasmine, musk and roses. Mine are the stars in heaven, the envy of the sun.*

[Girl AUTHOR] *Antonia will be the Rich and Powerful.*

[Girl WEALTHY LADY] *Mine are riches, luxury and pleasure*

[Girl AUTHOR] *Angeles, the Worker.*

[Girl PLOUGHSMAN] *The Worker? I object!*

[Girl AUTHOR] *The Worker. You’ll work from dawn to dusk. I command you.*

[Girl PLOUGHSMAN] *I object!*

[Girl AUTHOR] *I command you.*

[Girl PLOUGHSMAN] *I object.*

[Girl AUTHOR] *Take thy plow. Sofía, thy role is discretion. Rosa María, the Poor and Miserable. María Jesús, the Unborn Child.*

[Girl CHILD] *An easy enough role...*

[Girl Word] *Take thy place.*

[Girl THE POOR] *Why am I the Poor in this comedy? Why give tragedy only to me? Why can't I be King? Or Rich? Are they better men, to be given better roles?*
 [Girl AUTHOR] *The Poor. I give you nothing, for that is your WorIdly reward. I strip thy garments. Thou shaIt walk naked. All must pIay their part in this Comedy. The better man plays better his role, be it Rich or Poor. The remuneration shall be earned if merited. On this stage, life is but a performance.*
 [ALL] *On this stage, life is but a performance.*²⁷

*

Writing and reflecting upon the hundredth anniversary of the cinema about *La Strada*, in which we discover successive forms of the *theatre of the world* (the film registers yet another unrealised image: *The great Theater of Oklahoma calls you! . . . Everyone is welcome! . . .* from Kafka's *Amerika*, which Fellini planned to screen), it is impossible to forget the director's favourite image of the *world of the circus*, permanently present in his *oeuvre* and in particular in *La Strada*, which it organises and in which it appears in an extremely significant manner. Take the example of the magnificent scene of rolling up the tent of Signor Giraffa's circus, the announcement appearing at the end of the film: *Everybody come to the circus!... This evening - a great spectacle*, and the image of the arena against the backdrop of the sea. *La Strada*, a story about itinerant artists, seen today against the background of the entertainment proposed by the present-day cinema – that "art for the poor" – leads us to the suburbs, takes place somewhere on the side, far from main street, the centre, the principal current, the market-place-fairground with which contemporary art tempts us and which it values so highly. In *La Strada* Fellini guides us to the side-lines in order to show us that ultimately something actually does exist. This is why it is difficult to keep silent about yet another image portrayed by the poet and accompanying us from the very beginning. In it we are capable of capturing the essence of that particular predilection of the author of *La Strada* and, finally, the very essence of the portrayal of the world contained therein.

(...) *Strange, though, alas, the streets of Grief-City, where, in the artificiality of a drowned-out false stillness, the statue cast from the mould of emptiness bravely swaggers: the gilded noise, the flawed memorial. O, how an Angel would utterly trample their market of solace, bounded by the Church, bought ready for use: untouched, disenchanting and shut like the post-office on Sunday. Beyond though, the outskirts are always alive with the fair. Swings of freedom! Divers and jugglers of zeal!*

*And the figures at the shooting range of easy luck, targets that shake timmily whenever some better marksman hits one. From applause at his luck he staggers on further: as booths for every taste are wooing him, drumming, and bawling. Here's something special, only for adults, to view: how money is got, anatomy, not just to amuse: the private parts of money, all of it, the whole thing, the act, - to instruct and make potent.....O, but just beyond behind the last hoarding, plastered with adverts for 'Deathless', that bitter beer that tastes sweet to its drinkers, as long as they chew fresh distractions along with it..... just at the back of the hoardings, just behind them, it's real. Children are playing, lovers are holding each other – to the side, sombrely, in the sparse grass, and dogs are following their nature. (...)*²⁸

The protagonists of Fellini's film include grass, rain, snow, the landscape seen along the way, side roads, the people we pass while travelling. Gelsomina is often accompanied by children, who from a distance look at her with curiosity; at one point, a child even shows her a gate through which she can enter a garden. It is not true that *La Strada* depicts only a cruel world. When Zampanó abandons Gelsomina for the night and goes off with a prostitute, someone brings her a bowl of soup while she is waiting in the street, and a little girl approaches her. In *La Strada* we are led to the side where in the sparse grass dogs run freely, where at night a horse passes us in the street and in the morning we are awakened and frightened by the sound of a braying donkey. When Gelsomina finally leaves Zampanó and examines an ant, three musicians, "angels", as if straight out of landscapes with Tobias, walk by on their way to a festivity held in town; she will follow them. At a wedding children beckon to show her a concealed secret and lead her to Osvaldo, a child suffering from hydrocephalia, so that she would make him laugh. Having performed her dance, Gelsomina tilts her clown's hat for him.

A nun asks Gelsomina whether she would like to stay at a convent. The same happens when Zampanó lands in jail and the circus people propose that she go with them. A girl embraces her, saying that they could live together. "The Fool" drives her to the jail, takes off his blessed medallion and hangs it on her neck.

In *La Strada*, that cruel reality on the side roads of the world, people passed on the way are interested in



each other and sometimes even demonstrate tenderness, even if only expressed in the specifically Italian gesture of waving a hand while saying farewell when, contrary to the parting, they seem to be halting the moment of departure, as if wishing to keep the world still for as long as possible. *La Strada* is a record of the cruelty of the world but also of its gentleness. (And this is possibly the reason why the film causes so much pain). Here, on the sidelines, we witness how the bypassed people, the itinerant artists: Zampanó, “The Fool”, and Gelsomina (as in *Death Experience*) play *Life rapturously, not thinking of any applause.*

It is here that there will emerge the strange Orphic motif, which will knock Zampanó off his feet. Who can forget the scene in which Zampanó, older, with greying hair and traces of exhaustion after a rough night, leaves the circus wagon for a morning-afternoon walk and strolls along a wide street of some port town, passing other pedestrians. A car drives by, someone rides a bicycle. Zampanó stops, orders ice cream, asks for an additional lemon flavoured portion, walks on ... and then, across the distant sounds of ships and the street Gelsomina’s song reaches him. A woman sings it while hanging laundry, white bed sheets, on the other side of a nearby fence. Next to her, three children, holding hands, play, dance, spin on a shabby lawn. Zampanó finds out about Gelsomina’s death:

Oh, a girl who was here a long time ago used to sing it... she seemed crazy ... My father found her one evening on the beach... she was sick, poor thing. She had a fever. We brought her inside the house... When she was a little better, she used to sit outside ghee in the sun ... and play her trumpet.

What a strange scene: Eurydice sings. And what a strange Orpheus: he did not search for her and she found him!

*

Who is Gelsomina?

We waited long to pose this question. She resembles the entire film and incessantly evades our grasp. We are in the same situation as in the case of a road movie. We would like to describe and interpret it, but meanwhile it turns out that new images continue appearing – *In a hundred places there is still a beginning*²⁹:

*And we: onlookers, always, everywhere,
always looking into, never out of, everything.*

It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses.

*We arrange it again, and collapse ourselves.*³⁰

Nevertheless, let us try and say: Gelsomina. Thanks to her presence in this film-world we see something more: that, which in her naiveté or innocence she does not notice, which she barely and ineptly sup-

poses, and which for us is obvious and at a glance visible (after the incident with the prostitute she timidly asks Zampanó: *So you're the kind of man who runs around with women?*). On the other hand, thanks to her sensitivity and astonishment at the world, and seeing how she commiserates with the world, imitates a tree while actually becoming a tree, talks with fire, and feels the rain, we are able to perceive something that we would otherwise never notice or touch. Gelsomina is an extraordinary artist because she does not belong to either world. She is neither part of the world of "normal artists" nor of the world of "normal people" and undermines all our expectations; one can really say that *she is not of this world*.

As a rule, Gelsomina is presented as a personification of Goodness in a battle waged against Evil (Zampanó). Meanwhile, she remains as if beyond Good and Evil. In the film she is described in various ways: *It's not my fault, poor thing, that you're not like the other girls*. And just as in the film, when it seems that we are close, that we have named and understood something, it appears that we comprehend nothing. She endlessly astonishes us and topples our habits and the stereotypes and formulas in which we would like to enclose her and the film. She is capable of startling Zampanó, who, we are entitled to presume, has seen a lot. When it is necessary to drive on in a hurry she plants tomatoes on the side of the road. Tomatoes! Even Zampanó's face shows astonishment and lights up in a smile. I am not certain whether "Good" is the best way to describe her.

She is Difficult and Demanding. At times, she can even irritate, e.g. when she is late and, gazing into the distance, does not play the trumpet at the suitable moment she manages to annoy even Il Matto, an artist with the wings of an angel. On the other hand, once she does play she immediately delights him. When she performs for a nun we cannot say more than the listener, who exclaimed: *How well you play!* (Once again, she will amaze and evoke, even on Zampanó's face, a look of surprise with an admixture of anxiety and fear). We feel that in her presence we should be particularly careful. Her very presence, that of a person who cannot even make soup but plays the trumpet, shows how our customs and attributes, deeds, thoughts and emotions hang both on us and the characters in the world around her in the manner of actors' costumes, and how great is the number of the roles that we perform (take the splendid scene with a widow at a wedding, who is responsible for the whole household */I always eat on my feet/*). In her presence we realise just how careful the vocabulary of our learned interpretations should be while tackling the task of capturing her essence, apparently already close to the target but in effect forcing her (and the message of *La Strada*) into unambiguity and ready made formulas. One of the in-

terpreters wrote that Gelsomina is what the Gospel describes as a "simpleton". The French use the term: simple d'esprit, signifying a special sort of simplicity, close to sui generis "Matto'ism" due to its distance from the world and a tendency to remain within inner mimicry.

Owing to a meaning created by permanent mimed features depicting not so much emotions as psychic traits, Gelsomina becomes the opposite of Evil. As befits a certain philosophy of the world she is defenceless and not always self-aware Goodness, forever weaker than evil because she does not have at her disposal the latter's Energy and Focus. Refusing to accept, Gelsomina actually does so because she conceives protest as some sort of evil.

Gelsomina is a child albeit a make-believe one. She does not possess a realistic mind but her defenceless sensitivity is impeccable (she will succumb to true psychosis, some sort of a defence variant, only after Zampanó kills the Fool). We realise that only Gelsomina knows something about sensitivity. The ensuing image of the world contains its fundamental evil, and the spectacle enacted by *theatrum mundi* always ends with the victory of evil. Goodness plays the passive role, as in the Evangelical: *non resistere malo*, and there is a slight chance that in spite of everything evil could become "infected" with goodness. The beast-Zampanó sobs all alone on a beach, but we may doubt whether he will join goodness; it is much more likely that evil will devour also itself, in other words, that which was still human in Zampanó, who will perform an act of self-annihilation. The death of the Fool is supposed to accentuate the distinctness of the film's main couple since *Il Matto* emphasizes the helplessness of Goodness and just like Gelsomina suffers defeat.³¹

An outright Manichaean vision. A harsh verdict. But *La Strada* is not like that.

Where is Gelsomina in all this? Where is her Face? Where has she - almost a girl - vanished? ? We were so close, it seemed that we understand something, and now it turns out that we comprehend nothing. The problem with Gelsomina consists of the fact that the moment we call her "Good", "Simpleton" or "the simpleton type" we set into motion a whole sequence of concepts into which we would like to force her. True,



Gelsomina is “foolishness in the eyes of the world”, but this is no reason to immediately put her into a straight jacket of formulas safe both for us and our interpretations. What does it mean that Gelsomina is helpless Goodness, not quite self-aware? In the film she demonstrates self-awareness, and a rather painful one at that, when she answers Il Matto’s question whether she will leave with the circus or go off with Zampanó: *It doesn’t make any difference what I do. I’m just no good to anyone. I am tired of living.*

What does it mean: refusing to accept, Gelsomina actually does so because she conceives protest as some sort of evil? After all, she runs away from Zampanó, and then after the murder of “The Fool” confesses to him: *I wanted to run away. He told me to stay with you.* Perhaps Gelsomina does not have a realistic mind (although here too we could ask: does this signify matching our habits and corresponding to our criteria?), but she does think very concretely, even if “unrealistically”. When Il Matto speaks to her, indicating with his glance a pebble: *Take ... this stone, for example,* Gelsomina asks: *Which one?. Any one,* “The Fool” answers, picking it up from the ground and handing it to her.

Quite possibly, this is known as the genuine variant of psychosis - the psychosis of defence. In *La Strada*, however, which is a great drama about suffering and in which we find ourselves in the very centre of the question: why does the world suffer? and which resounds with the echo of voices saying: *Where is thy brother Abel? – Am I my brother’s keeper?*, the fact that Gelsomina keeps on repeating: *The Fool is hurt*, thus protecting herself against saying: “he is dead”, does not alter the essence of things, i.e. that evil is called by its true name: *You killed him.* Gelsomina will say this as only she can: with determination but gently, as if an Angel was speaking. Would it help to treat her as a “medical case” and describe her as “ill”? Would that bring us a single step closer? The light and darkness in *La Strada* created too much of an uneven pattern to explain Gelsomina easily by means of Manichaeism. *La Strada* conceals so many mysteries. We could say, if that were not to once again trap us in a stereotype, that *La Strada* has a certain symptomatic Franciscan trait – after all, this is the “poor theatre” albeit envisaged as great drama, the suffering of the Cosmos. This is the trace followed by Il Matto when he puts Gelsomina to a test in order to find out what she can do and causes her to cry: *Why was I put here on this Earth? – Zampanó wouldn’t keep you if you weren’t useful to him (...)* Now, *why didn’t he let you go? Unless, of course... Maybe he loves you? (...)* *He’s like a dog .He looks at a man and even when he wants to talk, he barks (...)* Still, *if you don’t stay with him, who will?...*

The commentator says that *there is a slight chance that in spite of everything evil could become “infected” with*

goodness (!?) But here evil is in love with goodness! Is Zampanó supposed to be her “wolf of Gubbio”?

We have already strayed off the main track and lost enough time in the “Good-Evil” trap. Time to turn back. *La Strada* and Gelsomina constantly astonish us. Was our earlier reflection that she remains outside the range of our conceits of “good” and “evil” not more significant? Was it not better to say at the very onset that Gelsomina is not any sort of “type” and is thoroughly untypical? We have already seen how everyone wanted her to stay with him/her. Everyone wished to have her at his/her side, to keep her. Gelsomina is unique. She is as eternal as grass.

La Strada, “cinema mundi”, “film-world”, a film about people on the move, migrating birds and artists appears to say to us: despite its toil, misery and shattered dreams this is a beautiful world.

Who is Gelsomina?

We are standing upon the threshold of a greater, strange mystery involving God and man, the world. Eurydice sings behind the curious Orphic motif emerging at the edge of the road. He did not seek her, and she found him! We hear an even more powerful voice: *I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not* (Isaiah 65,1)³².

*

In the very centre of *La Strada* there appears a symbol, a living, temporary revelation of the unexamined.

It makes an appearance in its entire directness, simplicity, complexity and depth. A pebble. Il Matto picks it up from the ground and hands it to Gelsomina. - *... If you don’t stay with him, who will? You may not believe it, but everything in this world has a purpose. Even this pebble... Even you have a purpose, even you with that artichoke head of yours.*

Gelsomina takes the pebble and gazes at it. Then she repeats this gesture, saying: *... If I don’t stay with him who will stay... .* When she stood in the shade, the stone was grey; now, the second time round, when she stands on another spot, in a stream of light, it becomes white.

I am in the fortunate situation of being able to show the direct impact and experience of the symbol, that what the pebble tells us. I have in front of me a description of an unintended experiment, a lesson born *under the impact of an impulse, the mood of a moment*, as its author wrote. This is a lesson taught by children. Before reaching for a more profound backdrop of the symbolic meanings of the pebble listen to the children and their teacher. Ewa Korulska wrote:

When lessons were held in the countryside I spent some time with the children by the sea. Enjoying the warm weather we went to the beach, taking a textbook entitled: To lubie! I wanted to read together with the fourth-form pupils The Decalogue of St. Francis, which harmonised



with the sound of the waves. The children sat around me on the sand and played with pebbles. When I proposed: perhaps we should listen to the stones for a while? Maybe they too have something to say? they obediently closed their eyes (You too, Miss! Why are you peeping?) and a moment later started describing what they heard the pebbles say. I tried to take notes, barely keeping up with the children.

[Here are fragments of the statements, including monologues of the pebbles written by the children (the names of the authors are in parentheses)]:

The sand is speaking to me. Once I was young and strong, but now am old. I was capable of overcoming a lot, a king, the toughest of all. Now I am sand, blown by the wind and devoured by the sea. I am helpless. A stone lives in the same manner as man does and reminds us about the existence of old age ...

... The stone says: I am lonely. I can be divided into grains of sand; the stone feels. It tells the story of the sea, keeps mum, but speaks and should be heard. It tells its story: it asks: "Don't break me! Throw me on the surface of the seawater; I feel good here; it is beautiful and I have my friends", but also: "I'm unhappy here and would like someone to take me home because the sea is so cold..."

...Everyone thinks that I am "ordinary" and ugly. But when I lie in the Sun then immediately the part of me that is covered with fool's gold starts to glisten. I am hard and rather sharp. This is not to say that I am evil. Now, I shall tell you the story of the sea. Once upon a time, Mr Glacier went for a walk. I don't know what he was doing here, but he carried some rocks. Finally, he brought me and said: - Now I shall die and you, dear stones, will live on here. Every stone has its rights. Suddenly, he began to melt and I think he wanted to drown me. Then I was cast off onto the shore, and became cold and wet. I underwent my baptism

and lay on the shore, thinking: - I'm so small and the world is so huge. (Magda Kaczyńska, aged 10)

... I wonder where my home is. Perhaps I come from the sea? No, probably not. I must have fallen from the sky or emerged from the ground. I would like to return home, to my birthplace. (Bartek Kraciuk, aged 10)

...I am a stone! Catch me! Take me, please! Perhaps physically I am silent but I speak! Although silent, I speak... I ask that someone touch my ego. I am not a mere stone but a pebble with an ego of my own... I resemble people! You don't believe me? When young and strong I overcame all obstacles, broke the waves and vanquished the wind. But there comes a time when I lose my personality and change into sand. Everyone ignores me, tramples over me as if I were nobody. But I am still a stone! (Kamila Raczyńska, aged 10)

... I am a pebble and would like to be with you and no one else. I want to be warm and to sleep at night in a house and not here, on the beach. I took a liking to you the very first time I saw you. You are my only friend. (Maciek Dolindowski, aged 10)

... Polished by water, each pebble is different. Its interior contains rain and rainbows, mountains and birds – or perhaps not? (...) Maybe a desert, total emptiness, someone's dreams immersed in the rain ... (Ula Brykczyńska, aged 13)

... If it could speak, it might tell me that once it was a Volcano, a Cave or perhaps even a Pyramid, the realm of Poseidon. No one knows (Agnieszka Janiszewska, aged 13)³³.

Among the great variety of Biblical meanings associated with stones the New Testament mentions basically two: precious stones (Greek: *lithos timios*) and the mysterious white stone (Greek: *psephos leuke*) in the Revelation of St. John: *To whom that overcometh I will*

give the hidden manna and I will give him a white counter; and in the counter a new name is written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it (Revelation, 2, 17).

The white pebble could be identified with assorted objects used in antiquity: an entry voucher or a tablet issued by a court of law testifying about the payment of a debt³⁴. At that time, a white pebble was a good sign: in court procedure it denoted acquittal of the accused, in wrestling it was awarded to the winner, and in elections to an office it marked the desirable candidate. Joyful days and festivities were also designated with white pebbles³⁵.

The colour white is a symbol of good fortune (Pliny the Younger: an auspicious day is marked with a white pebble) or triumph³⁶.

I cite only certain essential tracks among the great variety of meanings associated with the symbolic of the stone, and choose in particular those in which we may discern a more profound meaning and a more complex background for the symbol appearing in *La Strada*.

A stone is usually distinguished amidst natural objects by its rough, hard, and permanent material and often its mysterious shape indicating the existence of supernatural might; this awareness filled primeval man with religious fear. A stone, and in particular a majestic rock, revealed some sort of higher existence free from all change and offered a premonition of an absolute being superior to frail

*human existence. The pious fear of primeval man, therefore, referred not to the stone as such as to the reality concealed beyond this material phenomenon, to that which is "different" and belongs to a higher world.*³⁷

A stone reveals the presence of God; it is theophany, a place for a possible bond between the earth and heaven, the homestead of God and the gate of Heaven, in the manner of Bethel where Jacob fell asleep to experience the presence of God: *And when Jacob awaked out of sleep, he said: Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. And trembling he said: How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven. And Jacob, arising in the morning, took the stone which he had laid under his head, and set it up for a title, pouring oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of the city Bethel* (Genesis 28, 16-19)³⁸.

In Biblical tradition, the Stone-Rock-Bedrock belongs to the range of the symbols of God, a fortress that cannot be captured, a refuge for His people, bedrock that enables man to feel safe. Moses chiselled God's commandments on stone tablets: *And when Moses had lifted up his hand, and struck the rock twice with the rod, there came forth water in great abundance ...* (Numbers 20, 11; also: Exodus 17, 6; Psalm 114, 8).

A certain Jewish legend has it that this rock accompanied the people throughout the entire wandering in the



desert. Some believed that it was not a rock but a tiny pebble carried by Miriam, the sister of Moses.³⁹

Christ is the cornerstone, the stone, which the builders rejected (Psalm 118, 22; Mathew 21, 42-44).

The Christ-rock-resurrection perspective is to be found in commentaries to the *Canticle of Canticles*, and their essential concept appears already in the writings of St. Ambrose: “My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, shew me thy face. Let thy voice sound in my ears (...) (2, 14)”. The cracks in the stone and the fissures in the chasm are the holy wounds of the Resurrected. They are the refuge and permanent abode of the Beloved⁴⁰.

[Certain images in this dramaturgy and in that of *La Strada* appear to consistently refer to this background: Gelsomina gazing at a pebble white from the glare of light must be awakened, as if from deep slumber, by the whistling “Fool” so that she would return to reality; he even says to her: *Gelsomina, wake up*. The last time we saw her she was falling asleep in a spot of sunlight in some roadside stone ruin full of crevices and holes; she had been abandoned, left there by Zampanó. The woman singing Gelsomina’s song hangs white bed sheets to dry, and for a moment during her conversation with Zampanó a sheet covers her, so that we see only her trembling shadow on the fabric.

It is not our intention to prove or point out anything. We have arrived at this stage guided by images and an ensuing unclear affiliation that cannot be explained “to the very end”: the mystery of the symbol’s essence. *It is not true that we embellish our experiences with symbols; actually, it is they that cooperate with our experiences via processes of affiliation, which we understand only partially.*⁴¹

We do not wish to demonstrate anything or indicate anything apart from the fact that the simple Anthropology contained in this existential, realistic, visionary and metaphysical film: *even you serve some purpose*, recorded in the “parable about the pebble”, has solid foundations grounded in the shared experience of human depiction.

Perhaps this is a beginning that conceals the secret of our delight in the incessant procession of human fauna composed of *all those failed actors, singers and dancers, strange characters* with whom Fellini filled his films. And the fact that in a thus founded perception the Artist permits us to reach, together with him, the most inner, invisible dimensions of our humanity.

On the other hand, we are aware that our helplessness as regards our possibilities, problems, and difficulties with comprehending Gelsomina’s experience, with describing it and thus capturing her character that keeps slipping out of our hands in the manner of a pebble, and, at the same time, the penetration of the world of *La Strada*, which we described as closed

and perfect, appears to be even deeper since our understanding and interpretations always remain fragmentary and we share experiences with others. This is a mixture of the voices of children from the Great Theatre of the World, the children attending a lesson on a beach, and the voice of a supra-human power, as in that fragment of a poem by Wisława Szymborska, which we originally wanted to describe as a conversation between Gelsomina and Zampanó:

Conversation with a Stone

I knock at the stone’s front door

“It’s only me, let me come in”

(...)

I’m not unhappy.

I’m not homeless

My world is worth returning to.

I’ll enter and exit empty-handed,

And my proof I was there

will be only words,

which no one will believe.”

You shall not enter. . .

You lack the sense of taking part.

No other sense can make up for your missing sense of taking part.

Even sight heightened to become all-seeing

will do you no good without a sense of taking part.

You shall not enter, you have only a sense of what that sense

should be,

*only its seed, imagination.*⁴²

*

Nothing is known and everything is imagined...

*

In this manner we come to the last scene in *La Strada*.

Zampanó has found about Gelsomina’s death. The “animal”, the “beast” is now truly free and should rejoice. Finally free; is he the winner in this wrestling match? The sole witness of his crime is dead. After all, he did not want it to happen. Is the white bed sheet a lucky sign? It resembles a white pebble, a token for entering a new life, for freeing himself from an accusation and from someone (from Gelsomina?). Why is he unhappy? Why has he gone pale? May we assume that he will devour himself and perform an act of self-annihilation? He is an ordinary rascal, a Judas. He left her. So simple. What about that other rock, Simon Peter, who also refused to confess and betrayed? No, do not blaspheme! When did I see such an image, just like the one on the beach, that upward gaze? Just a minute, yes, it was *The Penitent St. Peter* by Ludovico Carracci of Bologna (1555-1619). No, he’s sitting differently. Yes, but that look! Do you remember Gelsomina’s last words: *We need a little more wood here. The fire is dying out*. He also ran away from the fire, afraid that they would recognise him... . You haven’t understood a



thing in this film. He simply left and was unable to do anything more for her. After all, he wanted to drive her back home. He could have driven her. She did not want to go. What would she do there? He loved her and left her happy in that spot of sunlight. What more could he do? He set her free. Such a horrible place. She fell asleep. No angel. Simply fear.

Remember, he said that no one even thought about them. Yes, an empty heaven? Existentialism? The same as on that beach in the last scene. You must be joking. He did not mean that, simply that no one saw them or caught them. And she went on and on, repeating the same thing: *The Fool is hurt*. What more could he do? He set her free so that she could forget. Anyway, this is terrible. No one would want to be in his place. But finally he found her. He wasn't looking for her. It was she who found him!

*

The last scene. We are at the seashore, the very edge of images. We can see only the beach, the shore, the sea: waves, low and high tide. Instead of an image of a child wanting to empty the sea, there is an old man collapsing on the sand, supporting himself with his hand: a three-legged animal. The prodigal son on a beach? Waves - low and high tide. No one else. The sea. The man looks up, towards the sky. He becomes overcome with terror, bends his head and sobs. Low tide - high tide. Next to him – waves. The sea. The eternal rhythm of the world?

O good God, what happens in a man to make him rejoice more at the salvation of a soul that has been despaired of and then delivered from greater danger than over one who has never lost hope, or never been in such imminent danger? For thou also, O most merciful Father, "dost rejoice more over one that repents than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance. And we listen with much delight whenever we hear how the lost sheep is brought home again on the shepherd's shoulders while the angels rejoice; or when the piece of money is restored to its place in the treasury and the neighbours rejoice with the woman who found it. And the joy of the solemn festival of thy house constrains us to tears when it is read in thy house: about the younger son who "was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found." For it is thou who rejoices both in us and in thy angels, who are holy through holy love. For thou art ever the same because thou knowest unchangeably all things which remain neither the same nor forever.

What, then, happens in the soul when it takes more delight at finding or having restored to it the things it loves than if it had always possessed them? Indeed, many other things bear witness that this is so -- all things are full of witnesses, crying out, "So it is". (...)

But it is also apparent in pleasures that are permitted and lawful: (...) in him who was dead and lived again,

who had been lost and was found. The greater joy is everywhere preceded by the greater pain. What does this mean, O Lord my God, when thou art an everlasting joy to thyself, and some creatures about thee are ever rejoicing in thee? What does it mean that this portion of creation thus ebbs and flows, alternately in want and satiety? Is this their mode of being and is this all thou hast allotted to them: that, from the highest heaven to the lowest earth, from the beginning of the world to the end, from the angels to the worm, from the first movement to the last, thou wast assigning to all their proper places and their proper seasons -- to all the kinds of good things and to all thy just works? Alas, how high thou art in the highest and how deep in the deepest! Thou never departest from us, and yet only with difficulty do we return to Thee!⁴³

*

The camera soars and on the beach we notice the figure of a man - Zampanó, who sobbing bitterly fell on the ground. Seen from a distance the figure slowly grows motionless and in the darkness loses contours, changing into a dimmer shape, which from afar resembles a pebble lying on the sand at the edge of the sea.

*

The last scene of *La Strada* could be described as: *Ecce Imago*. A scene in which we may feel, to cite the poet⁴⁴, *air without object. A gust within God. A wind.*

And Fellini shows this.

*

Federico knew well who he was and whence comes the wind that blows so that man may be born of the Spirit. Even though sometimes people (and he too, at certain moments of his life), just like those who heard Paul in Athens, seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17, 27).

He sincerely wished to rest his head on a stone as if on a pillow and to see in his dream, just like Jacob, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached heaven, the angels ascending and descending on it (Genesis 28, 12).⁴⁵

*

The history of the cinema follows its further course. The floor becomes covered with newspapers, weeklies, folders, advertisement leaflets, letters, and old mail. In a moment there will appear a newspaper featuring a photograph of Federico Fellini – a press farewell, news about the director's death. It will immediately vanish under a pile of other newspapers, folders, advertisement leaflets... These are the first frames of Wim Wender's *Lisbon Story*, a tale of the titular town based on amassed images and sounds. The film contains the following image: an elegant older man stands in a recording studio surrounded by super-sensitive microphones and a team of sound engineers. He speaks in a

slightly husky voice, pauses, takes deep breaths and we hear each gasp one when he speaks in the beautiful language of his country, incomprehensible to us:

God exists. The universe was created by Him. But what good would the universe be if men, if humankind disappeared? The universe would be useless. Or is it possible that it has a purpose of its own, even without the existence of Man?

We want to imitate God. That's why there are artists. Artists want to recreate the world, as if they were little gods. They constantly rethink history, life, things that happen in the world, things that we think happened, but only because we believe. Because, after all, we believe in memory. Because everything has already passed. But who can be sure that what we thought happened really happened? Who should we ask? Therefore, this world, this supposition, is an illusion.

The only real thing is memory. But memory is an invention ... In the cinema, the camera can capture a moment. But that moment had already passed. What the cinema does is draw a shadow of that moment. We are no longer sure that the moment ever existed outside the film. Or is the film proof that the moment existed? I don't know. I know less and less about that. We live, after all, in permanent doubt.⁴⁶

Saying these words, he turns around, glues on a moustache and puts on Charlie Chaplin's bowler hat, leaves the studio, walks down a street imitating Charlie's gait, and, finally, at the end of the street, turns, performs a gleeful jump and disappears round the corner.⁴⁷ After seeing the film and glancing at a newspaper we might find out that this elderly gentleman is the famous director Manoel de Oliveira, a classic of the Portuguese cinema.

Despite the ironic frame and declared doubts we remain under the impression of his declaration. There remains the feeling that ultimately something actually does exist.

In this way, we have found ourselves along the same path and at the same point of departure: Charlie and Gelsomina.

Once again, we walk down the same road, at the onset of the cinema.

Ultimately something actually does exist. The cinema - despite its deceptive nature, toil, illusions, and shattered dreams - is a beautiful world.

A beautiful world.

The Wenders film contains an unusual definition of the cinema, one that we would seek in vain in learned dissertations and writings by experts (at least I have not come across it). Wenders applies the ambiguity of the English word: "move". He maintains that the cinema is not so much "moving pictures", i.e. pictures that are "in motion" as pictures that are "moving", "poignant".

Carl Gustav Jung declared that when a given image is poignant we are dealing with an archetype. Here,

emotion is a symptom, a sign that thanks to the intermediary of a given image, the arch-image, speaks to us.

Jung repeated and expanded a thesis by Gerhard Hauptmann: *Poetry evokes out of words the resonance of the primordial word*⁴⁸ so that it embraces creativity as a whole. Is it not worth recalling within the context of the poignant and stirring images from *La Strada* and its author that the expression used most often about him and his work is, despite numerous different interpretations proposed by particular exegetes, the one about which they all concur: Fellini is a poet. A poet of the cinema.

From this point of view, *La Strada* is a symbolic film employing the meaning of the symbol and the mythological image formulated by Jung. Since Jung's psychology and theory of the archetype have amassed numerous prejudices let us hear what he had to say, since, in my opinion, the following fragment about the force of mythological images allows us to discover the secret of the force of the images out which *La Strada* is built and with which it speaks. It is the secret that we encounter in Fellini's entire oeuvre:

In each of these images there is a little piece of human psychology and human fate, a remnant of the joys and sorrows that have been repeated countless times in our ancestral history, and on the average follow ever the same course. It is like a deeply graven riverbed in the psyche, in which the waters of life, instead of flowing along as before in a broad but shallow stream, suddenly swell into a mighty river. This happens whenever that particular set of circumstances is encountered which over long periods of time has helped to lay down the primordial image.

The moment when this mythological situation reappears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were struck that had never resounded before (...)

The impact of an archetype, whether it takes the form of immediate experience or is expressed through the spoken word, stirs us because it summons up a voice that is stronger than our own. Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthral and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night.

That is the secret of great art, and of its effect upon us. The creative process, so far as we are able to follow it at all, consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is most lacking.⁴⁹

•
Asa – Nisi – Masa⁵⁰.
Gelsomina – the lost and found drachma?

Endnotes

- 1 Cardinal A. Sivestrini's Sermon during the funeral service for Federico Fellini (Rome, Santa Maria degli Angeli, 3 November 1993), transl. Zdzisław Słuchocka, [in:] "Kwartalnik Filmowy", No. 5/1994, p.120
- 2 P. Kral, *Europejszczyk Fellini* (European Fellini), transl. Maciej Godzimirski, [in:] „Film Quarterly”, No. 5/1994 pp. 142-159 (orig. version printed „Le Messenger Européen”, Paris 1987)
- 3 Ibid, p.147.
- 4 A. Werner, *W tanecznym korowodzie*, „Kwartalnik Filmowy” („Film Quarterly”), no 5/1994, ss.128-139.
- 5 Ibid, p. 139.
- 6 H. Politzer, *Rzemiosło interpretacji* [in his:], *Milczenie syren* (Das Schweigen de Sirenen), Warszawa transl. J. Hummel, Warsaw 1973
- 7 Cf. special issue of "Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 3/1988 about the symbol, containing texts by Sergei S. Avierintsev, *Symbol*, pp. 149-150, Yuri Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, pp. 151-154, and my *Symbol w etnografii*, p. 145-148. Declaring that the symbol not only "means" but also exists in a dialogue.
- 8 A. Silvestrini, op.cit. p.122
- 9 R.M. Rilke, *Czwarta Elegia Duinejska* (a Fourth Duino Elegy), [in:], *Poezje, transl.*. M. Jastrun, Kraków, 1974, p. 219.
- 10 Cf. J. Trznadel, *Federico Fellini – Giulietta Massina* („La strada” – „Ginger i Fred”) [in:] „Kwartalnik Filmowy”, nr 5/1994, pp. 164-168, where the author argues that in place of Zampano – Gelsomina, in “Ginger and Fred” one can see in old pair doubling of the Gelsomina's type.
- 11 T. Rutkowska, *Wędrowki Felliniego*, „Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, nr 3-4/1992, p. 23, see previous pages.
- 12 Cf., J.Trznadel, op. cit.
- 13 Cf. W. Michera his studies on symbol in film, W. Michera, *O wieloznaczności symbolu*, „Rocznik Muzealny” t. IV, Włocławek 1991, ss. 265-273. Where Author writing about the essence of the symbol quotes image of Blake's poetry: *To see a World in a Grain of Sand /And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand /And Eternity in an hour.*
- 14 See the study, essay of A. Wojciechowski on Harlequin, itinerant theater companies, circus performers, jugglers, in art from antiquity to modern art: *Wędrowni ptaki (Z dziejów pewnej legendy)* [in:] *Sztuka na wysokości oczu. Film i antropologia* pod red. Z. Benedyktowicza i T. Rutkowskiej, Warszawa 1991, pp. 33-46
- 15 R.M. Rilke, *Piąta Elegia Duinejska* (Fifth Duino Elegy), op.cit. 225
- 16 M. Kornatowska, *Fellini*, Warszawa 1989
- 17 G. Van der Leeuw, *Święta gra* (Sacer Ludus) [in his:] (*Holly and Sacred Beauty. Religion and Art.*), transl. Z. Benedyktowicz i S. Sikora, „Konteksty. Polska sztuka Ludowa”, no 3-4/1991, p. 7.
- 18 M. Cervantes, *Don Kichote*, transl. S. Ciesielska-Borkowska, Kraków 1949, after J. Trznadel, op. cit.
- 19 A. Wojciechowski, op. cit, p. 43.
- 20 Cf. G. Van der Leeuw, op cit.
- 21 Ibidem, p. 7.
- 22 Cf. D. Czaja, *Mozart i Salieri*, „Kino” nr 11-12/1990, pp. 32-35.
- 23 See block of articles, interpretations on “Babette's Feast” in this Anthology.
- 24 On this motive see Z. Benedyktowicz, *Maria and Martha ...* in this Anthology.
- 25 On this motive in *Amadeus* by Milos Forman and on this theme drew attention and developed his interpretation D. Czaja, in: *Mozart i Salieri*, op.cit.
- 26 R. M. Rilke, *Doświadczenie śmierci*, (Death Experience), op. cit., p. 105.
- 27 Calderón de la Barca, *Wielki Teatr Świata*. (The Great Theatre of the World), fragment by soundtrack from the movie *Elisa, My life* by Saura, transl. S. Ułłowicz
- 28 R. M. Rilke, *Dziesiąta Elegia Duinejska*, (Tenth Elegy), op.cit., pp. 255-257.
- 29 R.M. Rilke, *Sonet do Orfeusza, Sonet X*. (Sonnets to Orpheus, Sonnet X), op. cit., p. 335.
- 30 R.M. Rilke, *Ósma elegia, Elegie Duinejskie* (Eighth Duino Elegy), Ibidem, p. 247.
- 31 Cf. J. Trznadel, op. cit., pp. 165-166.
- 32 The first polish translation I put after *Biblia Tysiąclecia*, the second version after *Biblia Gdańska*
- 33 E. Korulska, *Dzieci pukają do drzwi kamienia*, „Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, nr 3-4/1995, pp. 217-219.
- 34 X. Leon-Dufour SJ, *Słownik Nowego Testamentu*, transl., Rev. K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1981, p. 330.
- 35 D. Forstner OSB, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, transl., W. Zakrzewska, P. Pachciarek, R. Turzyński, Warszawa 1990, p. 128.
- 36 X. Leon-Dufour SJ, op. cit., p. 330.
- 37 D. Forstner OSB, op. cit., p. 125.
- 38 D. Forstner OSB, op. cit., p. 126.
- 39 Ibidem.
- 40 Ibidem p.130
- 41 R.R. Niebhur, “Harvard Divinity Bulletin”, October-November 1981, p. 3.
- 42 From the Volume *Sól*, 1962, [w:] W. Szymborska, *Wybór wierszy*, Warszawa 1964, p. 110-111.
- 43 Św. Augustyn, *Wyznania*, (St. Augustine, Confessions) transl.. Z. Kubiak, Warszawa 1982, p. 134-135
- 44 R.M. Rilke, *Sonet do Orfeusza, Część pierwsza, Sonet III*, op. cit., p. 269.
- 45 A. Silvestrini, op. cit., p. 122.
- 46 I've included the soundtrack and press material for the film *Lisbon Story* by Wim Wenders
- 47 In a statement the director of the film (ibid., in press releases), we learn about how this piece of film was created: “I would not allow myself to write the text for Manoel de Oliveira. We talked only about the meaning of the film and the context of the scene in which he had to attend. He asked me for time to think and after a while he said he was ready. We let the movement of the camera. When we finished, he asked the crew to be turned, stuck a mustache and improvised parody of Charlie Chaplin.
- 48 C.G. Jung, *O stosunku psychologii analitycznej do dzieła poetyckiego*, [in:], *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane.* Transl., J. Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1976, p. 374.
- 49 Ibidem, p. 375-377.
- 50 *Asa - Nisi - Masa* it is an anagram of the word „Anima”, appearing in („8 and ½”) *Eight and a Half* by F. Fellini (A [sa] Ni [si] Ma [sa])

Nights of Cabiria by Federico Fellini (Anthropological Notes)

In Federico Fellini's film *Nights of Cabiria* I distinguish three thematic sequences as well as a "prologue" and an "epilogue".

"Prologue": River

Cabiria and Giorgio, a balloon salesman, are on a date and strolling along a river. Suddenly, the young man pushes the girl into the water and snatches her purse containing 40 000 lire. Drowning, Cabiria calls out for help and sinks in the river. She is rescued by three boys, who pull her out onto the riverbank (not the one along which she was originally walking, but the opposite one).

The mythological context of this scene is rather obvious. The river is a boundary whose crossing denotes transformation, especially considering that this is the Tiber. (In addition, Cabiria is a prostitute; cf. Latin: *lupa*). The incident in the film resembles a *sui generis* rite of submersion and brings to mind baptism. This ritual-initiation meaning of the scene is underlined by the comments made by the girl's saviours and the numbers they mention: *Did she go under? - Three times. - At least seven times! - Ten times!*

Cabiria loses consciousness, a state that depicts death (*Looks dead to me* – says one of the rescuers). Before she regains consciousness (*She opened her eyes*) she is lifted in a comical manner by her legs, which accentuates the abnormal and upside-down character of the situation in which she has found herself.

During the fatal crossing of the river Cabiria loses a shoe. This is an obvious suggestion that we are dealing with a transformation of the Cinderella myth, from which the interpretation performed by Fellini extracted deeply concealed and, as a rule, ignored strata.

The prologue of the film could be interpreted as an image of an initiation experience composed of symbolic death and rebirth. In this case, however, the scene is barely an "opening", the beginning of the path, with Cabiria attempting to change her life. The loss of a slipper (similarly as in the tale about Cinderella) guarantees that a return to the normal world would not

be final. The river also concludes the story in the epilogue: Cabiria once again finds herself next to a river, this time on a high escarpment, together with a fiancé whose love she does not doubt.

Now, however, Cabiria is at the onset of a dangerous journey across a world possessing the multiple features of a menacing netherworld. This is why in the story's composition the world of Cabiria succumbs to *sui generis* metamorphoses and gains the traits of an alien reality. Take the chronologically first example: when she returns home after the incident Cabiria is compelled to enter not through the door (the keys are in the lost handbag) but through a window.

It is only then that she realises just how close she was to death. *What if I had died?* – she wonders. It is precisely the experience of death that inclines her to make a decision about forsaking her former life. (*Can't you see I had enough?*), confirmed by burning all of Giorgio's belongings outside the house (purification by water is thus followed by cleansing by fire).

At this point, Cabiria emulates the gesture (dignified, by the standards of a suburban prostitute) performed by the despondent Dido abandoned by Aeneas – a ritual whose purpose in the *Aeneid* is revenge upon an unfaithful lover (sympathetic magic of sorts) and preparation for own death. Dido asks her sister:

Build a pyre, secretly, in an inner courtyard, open to the sky,

and place the weapons on it which that impious man left

hanging in my room, and the clothes, and the bridal bed

that undid me: I want to destroy all memories
of that wicked man ...

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book IV, 494-498

(In the course of this ritual, Dido has *one foot free of constraint*). Cabiria, who in this fashion severed her ties with the past, is now facing three trials.

Trial I: Hell – Heaven (À La Hollywood)

Cabiria is a lowly prostitute whose rank is expressed by her place of work: *Passeggiata Archeologica*. True, she is treated by the habitués as slightly odd and flip-pant, but here she feels "at home" and unrestrained. On this particular evening Cabiria resolves to set off exceptionally to the exclusive *via Veneto*, where elegant prostitutes promenade next to equally stylish venues. For a girl from the provinces this is a totally alien terrain, she feels awkward and does not know how to behave (and almost falls under a car). Her escapade can be perceived as a first act and attempt at abandoning her tawdry life and a quest for something new and better.

This extraordinary and almost magical world appears to be conducive for Cabiria: a miracle happens. After a quarrel with his fiancée, a famous film star Alberto Lazzari (played by an actor named Amadeo Nazzari) beckons her, standing nearby and observing the incident with interest, to his smart convertible. The meaning of the following scene - filmed according to a Hollywood recipe but clearly featuring the features of a pastiche (the smiling and happy girl-Cinderella rides at the side of a magnificent man of her dreams in a beautiful car, to the accompaniment of suddenly different, romantic music) - is multi-storeyed: it depicts both the true mood of the overjoyed Cabiria as well as her naïveté and the illusory character of the whole sudden transformation.

During her fairy-tale journey Cabiria visits two places: subterranean hell and heaven, both extremely attractive.

The first stage is an elegant NIGHT CLUB. Entering it is by no means an easy feat just as the unauthorised crossing of the boundary of the netherworlds: it is protected by fierce Cerber-guardians. A while later Cabiria is unable to extricate herself from drapes concealing a passage. She overcomes both obstacles thanks to her "divine" guide.

Inside the "infernal" club a band plays exotic rhythms, with dark-skinned female dancers moving to the beat. The ambiance is rather artificial and stiff, and the behaviour of all those present is slow-motion and unnatural. The still faces of the women sitting at the tables, as if lifeless, express surprise at the presence and conduct of the intruder, who is the only person to spontaneously express her joy and feelings once the couples begin to dance.

From the infernal underworld the path leads to THE ACTOR'S HOME – a villa on the edge of town. The most sacred interior of this temple, the bedroom, is on the first floor. The steep stairs leading to it, in the manner of Jacob's ladder or the *Scala sancta* in a Roman sanctuary, seem to reach the sky and their upper part glistens with unusual light. Here too, along the boundary, we encounter Cerber-guardians: two dogs run down the stairs.

The entire villa, in particular the bedroom, is full of assorted plants, trees, parrots and fish, comprising a setting straight out of paradise. It also brims with diverse wonders: a wall decoration resembles a monstera, a wardrobe opens automatically, the music is of a variety that Cabiria has never heard before, and the served dishes are unfamiliar and strange. The bed, in the manner of an altar on which a deity reclines, has a baldachin supported by characteristically twisted columns copied from the altar in the basilica of St. Peter in Rome (this element was preserved by Bob Foss in an American remake of Fellini's film).

Partaking of supper at this bed-altar Cabiria weeps with joy: *Who's gonna believe this when I tell 'em?*

If the film were to adhere to the Hollywood convention it would end right here. But then we would be dealing with yet another version of the Cinderella-story scenario for *Pretty Woman*. The Fellini film, however, keeps its distance towards the myth and breaks it or rather grants it the rank of existential authenticity.

The miracle vanishes. Illusion is defeated by truth. Alberto's fiancée returns. Throughout the whole night the idol conceals Cabiria in a bathroom and then sends her away. The girl refuses to accept money; this would, after all, ultimately break her unexpected connections with this heavenly world, but she is to be robbed also of this illusion – Alberto insists on paying her and the festivity turns into ordinary service rendered. Cabiria leaves the netherworld, hurting her nose against the invisible glass door of the palace. She goes back home. Nothing has changed.

Trial II: holy mountain

this time the trial is openly religious: a pilgrimage to a Marian sanctuary. The essence of its failure, however, remains the same: falsehood, lack of authenticity, and artificiality just as great as in high society stylised to resemble the American cinema.

Initially, when the habitués of *Passaggiata Archeologica* (including a cripple counting on a miraculous cure) plan with religious fervour a Sunday trip to Madonna del Divine Amore, Cabiria remains unconvinced. Apparently, her experiences with death (the river, the lost slipper) make it possible to suspect the unauthentic nature of the whole enterprise that, contrary to appearances, does not surpass daily life. Ridden with doubt she turns to a friend: *What am I asking for?* but decides to join the pilgrimage when she sees a procession walking down the street, a sight that apparently instilled some hope.

The sanctuary, this time ostensibly real (i.e. understood literally), is located on top of a mountain. A crowd of pilgrims, including Cabiria, climbs the slope. Holy stairs – holy mountain: in mythological categories they signify the same, i.e. the road to heaven. Unfortunately, here too sanctity is an illusion. The cripple calculates it into money, and women succumb either to the mood of fairground fun (*We're gonna get photos!*) or hysterical religiosity waiting for a miracle. Only Cabiria, just as in the nightclub, is distinctive due to the authenticity of her involvement. She prays: *Madonna, help me... to change my life. Bestow your grace on me too.*

After the service everyone enjoys a picnic, eating, drinking, and having fun, all with the exception of Cabiria, sad and lost in thought. The dialogue with her friend, Wanda, clearly demonstrates the sense of personal tragedy:

Cabiria – We haven't changed. Nobody's changed! We're all the same as before, just like the cripple.

Wanda – What do you want to change, Cabiria??

Cabiria – *You think this is the end? You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna sell the house. Everything. I'm leaving. . Good-bye... I'm through with all this!*

This part of the film ends just as it started: with a procession. This time, inebriated Cabiria jeers and accuses the women taking part in it of hypocrisy and falsehood, and calls them "little nuns": *Did the Madonna give you mercy?*

Fellini refuses not succumb to illusion. He traces falsehood even in those places, which claim to have exclusive rights to truth. A person desiring authentic transformation cannot preserve anything from his heretofore life, even a ready-made model of metamorphosis. Repeatable ritual is thus treated as a bogus phenomenon. Those incapable of abandoning all (see: Cabiria's evangelical words: *I'm gonna sell the house. Everything. I'm leaving...*) shall never change or reach heaven.

Trial III: magic and miracle

each of the trials to which Cabiria is subjected, and which she takes on, is associative with entering space possessing all the features of the mythical netherworld: alienness, distinctness marked with a boundary difficult to cross, peripheral or central location, a variously understood sacrum, strangeness, and wonder. In the third trial this space is a variety show.

Here, the tawdriness and illusory character of the proposed metamorphosis are literal: the role of the priest is assumed by a magician-hypnotist in the guise of a sorcerer. It is, however, precisely in this manner – according to the principle of mutually exclusive opposites – that the events transpiring on stage seem to assume the traits of specific authenticity, especially when they cross the limits of the commonplace tricks performed by a magician. Something whose genuine character cannot be doubted, is taking place. In this respect, the whole situation brings to mind the celebrated scene from *The Master and Margarita* and even more so the spectacle given by an illusionist-hypnotist in Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician*. In the case of the Fellini vision, the most authentic in the circus tackiness of the *variété* appears to be the magician's *magnetic* force.

Cabiria takes part in a hypnosis spectacle. First a group of men crosses the sea (a recurrence of the motif from the " prologue"). As always, Cabiria is afraid and initially refuses the magician's invitation (*Mind you, I have my own house...*), and then she succumbs totally to the spell and returns to the days of her youth.

Right in front of the audience, the magnetiser forces Cabiria to tell the truth about her feelings, and then

arranges a "fantastic" date. Cabiria, now under the assumed name of Maria, experiences authentic ardent love for a fictitious young man named Oscar; they meet, she picks flowers to make a wreath, and conducts romantic conversations (asking with hope: *Then it's true? You really love me? Is it really true? You're not trying to fool me? Do you really love me?*). The sincerity with which she professes her feeling is so great that the magician (wearing a carnival hat with devil's horns) becomes disconcerted by the extraordinary outcome of his tricks and interrupts the séance. Cabiria collapses in a faint, and the gathered crowd greets her while laughing heartily.

The show is illusion, but Cabiria's feelings are true - there is no doubt that the importance of this event is greater than that of the two previous trials. This impression seems it be confirmed by the unexpected effect of the séance: the released force of emotions evokes a real Oscar who by accident (*As if guided by fate*, to cite his words) found himself in the audience and in that part of Rome.

A third chance for a miracle. Upon this occasion, a humble accountant from the provinces, an orphan, appears to be a man worthy of Cabiria and, at the same time, totally different from her acquaintances from *Passeggiata Archeologica*: well-mannered, discreet and gentle. Most importantly, he is truly in love. Apparently, three times lucky – this time Fellini will permit his protagonist to attain her goal.

Certain unrest is introduced by Brother Giovanni, a Franciscan. Met accidentally (?), he instructs Cabiria: *Everyone should be in God's grace. Whoever lives in God's grace is happy*. Since Brother Giovanni does live in God's grace he apparently possesses nothing else or has no need for anything more. He is God's fool, happy and free, who has truly renounced the heretofore world and experienced transformation. *I'm at the San Francesco Monastery, but I'm hard to find. I'm always running around*. Later, it turns out that he is not even a monk and thus cannot (or: does not have to) hear confession. He remains outside all formal configuration, even the Church. We feel that he had discovered the truth, while Cabiria has only started searching for it.

Meanwhile, the miracle still works and Oscar proposes marriage (Cabiria assures Wanda: *You'll get a miracle, like me*). This is the first time that she implements the earlier, constantly repeated decision: she abandons all. She even sells her house, the frequently recalled symbol of her stabilisation and the centre of her secure life, however pitiful it might appear. It is worth recalling that she already told Albert Lazzari: *Mind you, I have my own house... with water, electricity, bottled gas, every convenience. I got everything. Even a thermometer. See this one here? She never, ever slept under an arch*. (Note the interesting and recurring theme of the thermometer, an instrument making it possible to check concurrence with the norm).

While leaving, Cabiria takes almost nothing with the exception of a portrait of her mother. The severance is to be absolute. The gesture stressing this act involves small change handed to two poor children – a symbolic payment of all debts. Cabiria decorates her head with a wreath of sorts, a symbol of purity, and is ready to set off on genuine journey towards a new life. A bus takes her into the unknown.

Epilogue. River, “Cursed” Wood And Carnival

The “Epilogue” is a *sui generis* repetition of the prologue. Oscar, strangely changed, wearing sunglasses and smoking a cigarette, now resembles Giorgio from the opening scenes of the film rather than his earlier self. Once again, the heart of the matter is money in Cabiria’s purse, but this time the sum is 350 000 lire.

Oscar takes Cabiria for a walk (*Let’s go. The sunset is beautiful in the woods*). They wander westwards, across a WOOD, which changes into the antechamber of HELL. Cabiria picks flowers, just like during the hypnotic trance at the *variété*:

Oscar – *Come. I know a shortcut.*

Cabiria – *Oscar! Where are you? What a bad boy you are! Look at these flowers. Like ‘em? They stink, but still. I never saw flowers like these before... What’s wrong? Are you sad? Why don’t we carve our initials on the trees?*

Oscar – *Let’s go. The sunset is beautiful in the woods.*

Cabiria – *The sunset, eh? Where do you wanna go?*

They reach a high river escarpment.

Cabiria: *What a strange light. Beautiful, isn’t it? I guess there is some justice in the world. You suffer, you go through hell but then happiness comes along for everyone. You’ve been my angel.*

By now we know that he is a fallen angel: Cabiria is wrong once again. Oscar’s hand, which she kisses, is ice cold. The question: *Can you swim?* confirms our suspicions about his intentions. The reply resembles the beginning of a journey whose end is now nigh: *Not me! I almost drowned once. But they saved me. Just imagine! I was pushed in!*

Back to the beginning: at this very moment Cabiria deciphers Oscar’s intention from the expression on his face: *What’s wrong? What’s the matter? You don’t want to kill me, do you? Answer me! You want to kill me? You want to kill me! Don’t just stand there. Say something! ... For... the money? For the money. Kill me! Kill me! Throw me off the cliff! I don’t want to live anymore.* Oscar flees with Cabiria’s purse.

Now for the last sequence of the film. Cabiria awakens on a riverbank. Holding a strange flower, a souvenir of death, she returns through the forest.

This time – only now! - she has lost everything: home, money, all the support in the world known to her, and, predominantly, the wish to live, all hope. Perhaps this third trial was a success after all?

Suddenly, there resounds surprisingly gay music. In the centre of the wood there appear several merry-makers, dressed in costumes and wearing tall hats resembling those of a wizard; someone is playing a saxophone, someone else a guitar, someone is singing, everyone is dancing. This woodland carnival should be comprehended as a sign confirming the rejection of heretofore observed norms, but also as a symbol of hope, transformation, renaissance (one of the revellers says: *Maurizio, hurry up! We’re leaving! We’re gonna lose our way going home!*).

The whole group surrounds Cabiria. All play for her and the guitarist barks like a dog. The words uttered by a girl in a hat, who smiling greets Cabiria: “Good evening”, as if welcoming her, new born, to a new world, assume special importance. Cabiria tearfully replies, smiling for the first time. With a small nod of her head she greets everyone, including the viewers - for a fraction of a second she gazes straight at the camera.

This barely discernible smile is a sign that Cabiria’s quest has ended successfully.

*

Frequent mention is made of the ease with which Federico Fellini used to alter the details of his biography recounted to journalists. His stories resembled more the creation of the part of a film character than an official life story. Particular events, activity, words and statements recalled elements of a work of art, just like metaphors in a poem that cannot be treated literally.

A recognised and as it were confirmed biography denotes becoming accustomed, the subjection of one’s life to a certain scheme rendering us distant from ourselves and our truth, full of paradoxes and contradictions. This is why Fellini apparently attached utmost importance to a concession to naïveté and ridiculousness, a sign of the absence of adaptation and being inured.

One of the symptoms of searching for the truth is naive astonishment – so frequently demonstrated by Cabiria. She is surprised by that, which everyone else regards as obvious because it is “normal” and recurs according to an old scheme. Such naive wonder – extremely comical – is an indication of coming closer to the truth and even sanctity.

Contrary to all appearances, Fellini, a master of blasphemy, was simultaneously engaged in a quest for sanctity free of convention and hypocrisy. Blasphemy, or rather a state described by some as such, possesses, similarly to laughter, a purifying power. In my opin-

ion Fellini's films, starting with the most celebrated *La Strada*, tell about man's path towards such a state. The same holds true for *Nights of Cabiria*, a film about a poor Roman prostitute, naive or outright innocent, who, totally unaware of the rules of the game, seeks love, happiness and feelings. The dramatic consistency with which Fellini shows the tragedy lurking in the Cinderella myth is incredible. In doing so, he demonstrated that naïveté is tantamount to believing in a miracle produced by a good fairy. It is just as naïve to believe in the love of a prince, who having completed playing the part of a lover returns to his mundane occupations.

Nonetheless, it is this naïveté, i.e. incessant roaming, that can ultimately guide Cabiria to a dark forest,

to the edge of a precipice and the world, where she loses absolutely everything and even forsakes all hope. Is this not, however, a situation in which we finally free ourselves from the illusions created by life and remain with the reality of our dreams?

Fellini is not a moralist but a teacher: when in the closing scene Cabiria's tearful face displays for a fleeting moment her distinctive and meaningful smile, and her eyes for a brief, almost unperceivable split of a second look straight at the camera, Fellini appears to be turning towards us, saying: have the courage to embrace naïveté – it will guide you all the way to this point. And it is here that true life begins.



Giulietta Masina in *Nights of Cabiria* by Federico Fellini

It is amazing how many cultural models, character types or masks can be used by an artist while creating his work. It is just as interesting that this enormous number of cultural models includes those that are applied most frequently, and references to which endow not only the given work but also its author with virtuosity. Such a cultural model is the mask. At this stage it is necessary to transcend, albeit not to the very end, the most trivial comprehension of this term as part of a carnival costume concealing the face. The mask conceived as a cultural model is a specific symbol of the *self*, something that grants its wearer a new being, a new identity, often demonic or comical but always diametrically different from the true *self* of the person hiding behind it. It was precisely such a mask – helping to become a clown, a devil or anyone else – that often inspired assorted artists, as Mikhail Bakhtin noted in his essay: *Characteristic here is the artistic structuring of an image out of durable popular masks – masks that had great influence on the novelistic image of man during the most important stages of the novel's development (...)*¹. Such impact was exerted by the mask not only on literature but to an equal or perhaps even greater degree upon painting, photography or film. Bakhtin stressed that a special sort of mask – the folk mask² – could have been chosen for assorted situations, was capable of *bearing* merriment and tragedy, and no plot could destroy it once and for all.

GRZEGORZ
NADGRODKIEWICZ

Tragicomedy dell'arte, or Pierrotade à la Godard

It is exactly from the tradition of the folk mask that Harlequin, his “nephew” Pedrolino, and Pierrot, perhaps the best known of the three, originate. The latter, a clown with a white powdered face and wearing a white costume with a ruff, became one of the possibly most widely recognised masks. It was Pierrot who was rendered a symbol of mute, unexpressed and unfulfilled love. Regarded as a tragic fool, he saddened and entertained at the same time; first and foremost, he inspired artists and apparently continues to do so up to this day. The Pierrot character attained special place in the cultural tradition of France, especially within the range of the French pantomime. It was precisely





French artists who most frequently resorted to the image of Pierrot, outfitted their protagonists with a set of features ascribed to him, and endowed the reality created by them with the traits of a world in which the tragedy of the sad clown took place. What was the source of the strong position of the white-faced clown in French culture? Naturally, there is a reason why the image of Pierrot affects artists, including Godard, to such a degree. Not by accident is Pierrot's name not just an ordinary diminutive of the French: Pierre.

The Pierrot *dramatis persona* descends, albeit not in a straight line, from the seventeenth-century *commedia dell'arte*, i.e. an artful or professional spectacle in which clearly defined characters improvise their lines, embellishing them with comical *lazzi* – dialogue or action. The core of each Italian comedy cast was composed of two oldsters (Pantaloon and the Doctor), ladies and lovers (*Inamorati*) and two *zanni* (e.g. Brighella and Harlequin) – the most popular and characteristic for the *commedia dell'arte*. The *zanni* were described by various names, such as Harlequin, Trufaldino, Brighella, Buratino, or Pedrolino. Robert F. Storey in his book *Pierrot. A Critical History of a Mask* derived from the latter the name of the sad French clown: *Pedrolino* is an “Italian equivalent” of Pierrot³. Storey cited several other theories concerning Pierrot's predecessor, but he regarded the hypothesis associated with Pedrolino as best justified and proposed the most extensive arguments in its favour. Storey attributed the introduction of Pierrot into French literature to Molière, who in the middle of the seventeenth century wrote and staged in Paris the comedy *Le Festin de pierre*, in which one of the protagonists was Pierrot – a mellow lover though wily and witty⁴. This is the onset of Pierrot's presence in French drama, from which his image spread rapidly to other domains of the arts. The early Pierrot still possesses many features of the Italian Arlecchino. Storey described him as *l'homme spirituel*⁵, but in time French mentality and personality turned him into an unhappy Pierrot. The colourful costume composed of

rhombi and worn by Harlequin became replaced by a white billowing blouse and wide pantaloons. Gradually, Pierrot assumed serious psychological features and a variety of traits. Although he was most frequently known as Pierrot, in art he appears just as frequently as Harlequin, his less popular synonym. According to Storey, despite the fact that Pierrot underwent a change he is still simple-hearted, trustful and independent, and his love is still naive⁶. Pierrot constantly offers proof of his Italian lineage, revealing ignorance of the people surrounding him and in certain situations even his stupidity.

With a thus shaped personality Pierrot no longer fits into a single epoch but is above time. The poses he assumes and the mask he puts on not only build his image but become an outright symbol of a certain condition and state of spirit inclined towards sentimental pessimism. For assorted artists Pierrot driven by passion became an inspiring *dramatis persona*, a form that for long has been full of contents; now it suffices to add a “contemporary face” so that he might express all that an artist might wish.

Artists who acted in this way include Jean-Luc Godard with his film *Pierrot le fou* (1965). Taking into consideration the original title it would be difficult to seek a more direct suggestion. The director referred not only to the image of the character, aware of the extent to which it is a carrier of meanings, but also to one of the features of Pierrot's personality. Godard's Ferdinand not only turned into a tearful Pierrot but also contains traits of the devious and clever Harlequin. In the case of Ferdinand these are synonyms, since he possesses as many countenances as the number of the names of the *zanni*. Ferdinand is unable to reveal his true *self* because he cannot take off his mask – the role and its performer are merged into a single complex character. Ferdinand is funny not only as a result of what he does and says – he is also eccentric. In other words, he is one of the contemporary embodiments of Pierrot-Harlequin. Jean-Luc Godard



applied an interesting trick of symbolically dressing his lead protagonist to resemble the prime representative of the French pantomime. The spectator may discover the meaning of all the parallels between Ferdinand and Pierrot by justifying the presence of this particular artifice in *Pierrot le fou* with the assistance of a trans-textual motivation. Reference to the convention of the *commedia dell'arte* (i.e. an assumption of the spectator's previous experience) is necessary in order to be

able to perceive all the similarities and differences between Godard's lead protagonist and Pierrot.

Correspondence between Godard's film and the Pierrot tradition is realised upon several levels. A reference to this tradition is noticeable already in the verbal stratum of the film – the most obvious example being the title. When Ferdinand and Marianne become known as the lead protagonists there emerges a successive parallelism – the girl, despite Ferdinand's

constant and failed protests, continues to call him Pierrot. There comes to the fore yet another feature of Ferdinand as Pierrot – he refuses to accept his new name and his new and adverse – ultimately tragic – fate.

The iconographic stratum of the film indicates even more distinctly that Ferdinand actually is Pierrot. Godard inserted snapshots of reproductions of paintings either in the direct vicinity of the photographed Ferdinand or takes with Marianne, immediately followed by the figure of Ferdinand. The paintings bring to mind assorted portrayals of Pierrot by Picasso, August Renoir or Henri Matisse. The most characteristic and easiest to extract from the film is a reproduction of Renoir's *Pierrot*, with a small boy wearing the costume of a clown. The director thus suggested Ferdinand's childish and naive nature matching the personality of Pierrot.

Pierrot le fou refers to the Pierrot tradition also in the construction of the protagonist. Ferdinand-Pierrot steers his life in such a way that each encountered surprise proves to be more acrimonious than the previous and all are tragicomic. The love that he encounters is more bitter than sweet and has an inevitably tragic end. The closing scenes stress the connection between Ferdinand and Pierrot – a confirmation of his condition of a tragic “fool” who perishes in an absurd manner.

Throughout the entire film Ferdinand reads or carries a comic book with the curious title *Les Pieds Nickelés*. Although none of its fragments presented on screen actually display Pierrot, the poetic, shape and colour scheme of the characters bring to mind the appearance of clowns. Pierrot's clumsy floundering in a strange and sad world is the comic and simultaneously tragic act of a clown. The fact that Ferdinand carries and reads this particular comic book (in other words, is somehow attached to it) suggests that his life too can be treated as a clown's frenzied performance.

A detailed description of the Ferdinand *dramatis persona* is rendered possible by applying Arthur Symons' extraordinarily apt characteristic: *Pierrot is one of the types of our century, of the moment in which we live, or of the moment, perhaps, out of which we are just passing. Pierrot is passionate; but he does not believe in great passions. He feels himself to be sickening with a fever, or else perilously convalescent; for love is a disease, which he is too weak to resist or endure. He has worn his heart on his sleeve so long, that it has hardened in the cold air. (...) He knows that he is condemned to be always in public, that emotion would be supremely out of keeping with his costume (...)*⁷. It is in this way that the scheme of the Harlequin character is realised in Ferdinand's life. His love for Marianne is unhappy and by no means pure because it is smothered by jealousy (this is the reason why he shoots her). Despite the turbulent course

of their relationship it is difficult to believe in great passion. The reason lies in the fact that Ferdinand *becomes learned, perverse, intellectualising his pleasures, brutalising his intellect; his mournful contemplation of things becoming a kind of grotesque joy*⁸.

Why then does the spectator not become repulsed by a protagonist who complicates his fate only to ultimately commit an absurd suicide? This is because the construction of the lead character in *Pierrot le fou* contains a certain dominating feature that justifies Ferdinand, i.e. a set of traits linking him with the tradition of the Italian comedy. Ferdinand is not solely an up-to-date version of the French Pierrot, and although he has a multitude of traits resembling the latter the prevailing ones connect him with the protagonist of the *commedia dell'arte*. If we were to assume that Ferdinand is one of the *zanni* then he cannot enact his *lazzi* alone. A tempting hypothesis suggests that we should treat the whole film by Jean-Luc Godard as a *sui generis* emulation of the *commedia dell'arte* scheme. Apparently, quite a number of arguments speak in favour of accepting this hypothesis as an interpretation-analytical key. This concept places emphasis on interpretation rather than on analysis indicating actual relations within the film. Proving the compatibility of the *commedia dell'arte* scheme with the structure of Godard's film will resemble interpretation rather than methodical analysis.

The *commedia dell'arte*, whose characteristic features include exceptional force and durability, is one of the few products of the theatre⁹, which after so many centuries are capable of strongly affecting works with lively dramaturgy¹⁰. Apparently, *commedia dell'arte* influences not only the epic or the drama but with equal success also film. *Pierrot le fou* seems to be a model-like example of translating the scheme of the Italian comedy into the language of film in an incompletely pure form but with the preservation of its specific features while, at the same time, reducing the comedy aspects. One would like to say that in this version we are dealing with a specific *tragicomedy dell'arte*. Such a description would be justified in situating Godard's work within a given national tradition. The French, welcoming Italian actors of the *commedia dell'arte*, demanded that the performances be given at least a pseudo-tragic overtone. When they finally began to continue the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, scenes maintained in the tragic style became very popular. The subsequent tradition of Pierrot in France enforced, by the very nature of things, tragedy or outright tragicomedy upon artists who referred to the mask of a clown with a white-powdered countenance.

The core of Godard's *tragicomedy dell'arte*, naturally maintained in the mode of the Italian comedy, are the *zanni* – the *spiritus movens* of action. The text of *Pierrot le fou* provides numerous evidence that not only Ferdi-

nand but also Marianne (and in the second part of the film decidedly the latter) stimulates the action of the film. In the *tragicomedy dell'arte* conception Marianne (applying her entire energy) will play a different part and the mask of the *zanni* must be entrusted to a man. The tragicomic *zanni* is thus, obviously, Ferdinand. As the lead protagonist of the film he simultaneously combines the function of two *zanni*, since as Pierrot he comprises a peculiar combination of astuteness and stupidity. *He delights in cheating others, but himself is easily cheated*¹¹. Harlequin-Pierrot can become the axis of the plot (when he drives Marianne home and inaugurates their romance), but at other times he receives only lashes and blows (e.g. when two gangsters try to drown him). Upon yet other occasions he tends to reveal the diabolical features of his ancestor, Harlequin (when he kills his beloved), but can also be the naive Pierrot (when he believes Marianne's assurances about her love for him, while she casts a conspiratorial glance at the audience). He is also a servant, as befits the *zanni* character, when without protest he allows Marianne to embroil him into smuggling weapons. His servility is visible in the film's opening scenes showing him as the "nice" son-in-law of Monsieur Espresso, forced to take part in receptions. Within the context of this argument it becomes significant that both his wife and mother-in-law are Italian (their pretentious surname easily brings to mind Italy). Godard's Pierrot, the son-in-law of the Espressos, thus remains within the range of the impact of Italian culture and the Harlequin tradition. In other words, Ferdinand-Pierrot is also a clown and a jester, increasingly involved in grotesque situations and entertaining the spectator, while at the same time unable to escape the enchanted circle of self-propelling absurdities.

Commedia dell'arte was constructed out of intrigues devised by the *zanni* and the small deceits planned by their female lovers – peasants or town dwellers known in the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* as soubrettes. As a rule, they were housemaids and the multiplicity of their names equalled that of Harlequin (e.g. Smeraldina, Arlecchina, Franceschina). The most popular was Columbine, who was in love with Harlequin or loved by him. Here is her description by Konstanty Miklaszewski: *She was a bonnie, comely and glib country lass; fearing nothing, she treated her masters with license, at times even with impudence, reacting immediately with word and gesture; fit and supple, she was even capable of striking a man*¹².

Such a likeness immediately brings to mind Godard's Marianne, a baby-sitter (she takes care of children while Ferdinand and his wife go to a party at the Espressos). As a character out of Godard's *tragicomedy dell'arte* she too fits within the limits of the comic and tragic world and in no way is worse than Columbine when she assaults a man at a gas station.

Nor can we negate Marianne's physical prowess (watch her on a beach dancing together with members of her "brother" Fred's ballet company). Marianne certainly feels more at home in the tragicomic world than does Ferdinand, although she too experiences grotesque and, at the same time, tragic situations, their end being the moment of her death. Bold, ruthless and fearless, Marianne takes part in gun smuggling although she becomes emotionally involved; her treatment of Pierrot, to whom she is unfaithful, is outright cynical. Her language sparkles with brilliant ripostes. At the same time, she is unable to overcome the *sui generis* destiny looming over the fate she shares with Ferdinand. Although Marianne seems to be courageous, their joint journey towards death contains moments of weakness (characteristically, while together with Ferdinand on an island, she cries out: *What am I to do? I don't know what to do!*).

Marianne also turns out to be similar (even if only due to her name) to a character in *Les Originaux*, a play by Houdart de la Motte¹³. Marinette, the heroine of this drama written in the spirit of the *commedia dell'arte*, is the object of Pierrot's unhappy love and just like Godard's Marianne pushes the miserable clown to the edge of ultimate despair; helpless and distressed, he poisons her and immediately afterwards himself. Is this scenario of events identical to the finale of Godard's film? The historical transformation of the *commedia dell'arte* is the reason why the Italian housemaid differs from her French successor, the French soubrette. *France (...) refined the early rough Colombina into the dainty Columbine*¹⁴ – wrote Alardyce Nicoll in *World Drama*. The French soubrette has become more sophisticated and elegant, wiser and wittier. She had, therefore, undergone a certain evolution, experienced also by Marianne in *Pierrot le fou*. The opening sequences introduce us to a meek girl who in the course of her acquaintance with Ferdinand starts showing her true face. True, the evolution of Columbine is one from vulgarity to finesse, while in the case of Marianne it runs an opposite course, from calmness and subtlety (the conversation held in a car about life that is not a novel) to cynicism and hypocrisy (the glance at the camera during the stay on an island, betraying her true feelings), but it is the very fact of experiencing a transformation and becoming someone else that is essential.

Just as the Italian comedy so the *tragicomedy dell'arte* is a *sui generis* masquerade. The assumption of masks and the constant changing of the protagonists' names comprise a curious ritual of becoming immersed in mystery and altering identity. Columbine too takes part in this ritual – first she is Pasquella, then Pierrette, while upon another occasion she becomes Ricciolina. Similar conversions of identity, although rather in the metaphorical sense, are experienced by Godard's Marianne when Ferdinand calls



her by using the names of the female characters in a book he is currently reading: Marianne becomes Cassandra or Virginia. Her new name always predicts danger and is an ominous spell whose victims ultimately include Pierrot. Here is another parallel between Columbine and Marianne – their fondness for changing costumes. Marianne does so with genuine expertise, very often, and always imperceptibly for the spectator. Nicoll noted that Columbine had plenty of clothes, beginning with a housemaid's casual attire and ending with a stunning white dress known from pantomime¹⁵. Finally, both women share an outright tragic love for the hapless Pierrot.

The Godardian *tragicomedy dell'arte* is, however, not merely a configuration of mysterious masks and complicated personalities but living people enacting their *lazzi*. Fleeing from Paris, the tragicomic couple, Marianne and Pierrot, incessantly takes part in assorted comic episodes. Just like the protagonists of the true *commedia dell'arte* they constantly “stage” for the spectator assorted images. Take the example of the scene at a petrol station, with both demonstrating grotesque bravura, the scene enacted in a port – a politically *engagée* story of a Vietnamese woman and an American man, or, finally, the sensually danced and performed song about *the fate-line* and *the thigh-line* (*Ma ligne de chance, ta ligne de hanche*). The *lazzi* collection includes additional takes in which Pierrot displays assorted facial expressions (the cigarette smoked in Marianne's Parisian home or the face of an old man speaking about the necessity of describing *la vie toute*

seule). Naturally, this is a direct reference to the tradition of Pierrot as a pantomime actor and thus to *lazzi* enacted by Pedrolino¹⁶. *Lazzi* presented by Marianne and Ferdinand obviously feature a comic trace derived directly from the *commedia dell'arte* albeit always accompanied by tragic overtones. Each scene in which they take part intensifies the tangle of ill-fated circumstances, thus creating a situation without a solution. Escaping from Paris they become involved in car thefts, shoot-outs, gun smuggling and unhappy love, which becomes the reason for their ultimate tragedy.

The *commedia dell'arte* tradition entails clever sayings (*bons mots*) and jokes. Both Pierrot and Marianne are skilful adversaries in verbal duels and witty tête-à-têtes. They are also capable of conducting serious conversation (such as the one on the island, when they discuss their life needs). Even stronger than *via* the *bons mots* they are linked with the *commedia dell'arte* by eroticism, which in the film is realised more in the verbal stratum than the visual one. Riding in a car, Marianne tells Ferdinand: *I am kissing you all over*. On a moonlit beach she requests: *Let's make love*. Pierrot, enthralled by her body, sings: *Ta ligne de hanche*. Their words appear to be desultory but they contain an immense emotional load. Mutual erotic fascination can be depicted by citing Konstanty Miklaszewski's description of the erotic element in the *commedia dell'arte*: *Cult of the body, passionate eroticism, monstrous entanglement of dirty intrigues, pandering, adultery, jokes, expressions and gestures more than ambiguous – such is*

the indecency of the *commedia dell'arte*¹⁷. This was the appearance of a world revealing its affiliation with Godard's world of the *tragicomedy dell'arte*, full of dishonest gangster business affairs, false love and a genuine imbroglio of human destiny.

Commedia dell'arte, known also as *commedia popolare*, was intended mainly for a wide audience composed of commoners. It was compelled, therefore, to embark upon assorted issues of interest to this particular social stratum. Nonetheless, numerous features held dear by the public were ridiculed as befits a comedy (e.g. the lascivious behaviour of the soubrettes or the brutality of certain *zanni*). In a similar manner, the *tragicomedy dell'arte* mocked the mass culture of the 1960s (by way of example, the colourised takes in the scene of the party held by the *Espressos* deride the guests' captivation with pop culture). Godard, however, did not allow his *tragicomedy* to reach a member of the audience in such a facile way as the *commedia dell'arte* did. It is much more difficult to detect more profound meanings in his text but elements subjected by the director to a negative evaluation can be discerned rather easily.

*Commedia dell'arte*¹⁸ is a professional, well-crafted comedy known also as *commedia all'improvviso*, a theatrical genre whose characteristic feature is improvisation of the text. Godard's *tragicomedy dell'arte* is also somewhat *all'improvviso*. Naturally, improvisation is the domain of the actors – Marianne and Pierrot, whose entire journey from Paris to the south of France is a sequence of improvised incidents and situations. Talking with each other they seem to be playing a curious game intent rather on the aesthetic effect of the statements than on attaining any sort of understanding. The dialogues thus resemble witty and impromptu questions and answers rather than factual conversation, excellently illustrated by a fragment in which Marianne and Pierrot are sailing in a boat and discussing politics. Marianne starts calculating the length of human life into the number of the seconds it contains. Although her numerical tirade possesses certain charm it does not help the conversation to make any progress. Their curious behaviour, those tragicomic *lazzi* that are the product of an impulse, is also improvised. Situations when both protagonists appear as actors seem to be entirely devoid of any sort of rational premises. The theft of a Cadillac at a gas station and its subsequent drowning in the sea by Ferdinand are deeds dictated by some sort of irrational stimuli, hastily improvised situations.

The protagonists of Godard's *Pierrot le fou* are not merely comedians in love. Pierrot as a *zanni* and Marianne as a soubrette are also nimble and agile actors in a *tragicomedy dell'arte*¹⁹. Writing about Harlequin buffoonery Miklaszewski indirectly offered a characteristic of Ferdinand's behaviour: *His poses are composed symmetrically, foolish but witty, vulgar but full of charm, always strange and reflecting the state of the soul in accord-*

*ance with the given situation and theme. Marianne vel Columbine – Miklaszewski wrote further on – is lively and merry, implike and limber, with a lissom body in constant motion*²⁰. Marianne and Ferdinand continuously prove how much they match the protagonists of the *commedia dell'arte*. Every now and then Pierrot leaps like an acrobat from trees or cliffs, sings and even dances with Marianne, as in the scene when singing *Ma ligne de chance, ta ligne de hanche* they execute a mock *pas de deux*. They are perfect for the parts of Columbine and Harlequin, who – to travesty Nicoll – are bouncing on a stage like a spring and dodging with extravagant gesture²¹.

In the *tragicomedy dell'arte* Pierrot, heir of the Renaissance Pedrolino, becomes a character endowed with truly Romantic features. Storey calls him *a fallen angel*²², someone who suffers from inner unrest, succumbs to Romantic melancholy, experiences a spiritual rent, and is doomed. Godard's Ferdinand is familiar with such moods. The world in which he has found himself endlessly provides him with reasons to feel torn apart and to steer his fate towards an ultimate catastrophe. Looking into the rear view mirror of his car he utters the symptomatic words: *...I see the face of a man who's about to drive over a cliff at a hundred kilometers an hour*. His Romantic nature is also confirmed by a scene in which together with Marianne he lies on a beach bathed in moonlight. Harlequin and Pierrot also frequently pursued love affairs with their soubrettes in moonlight or rendered it the theme of poetic metaphors. Storey too mentioned this fact, thus simultaneously confirming Pierrot's Romantic nature²³.

In Godard's film, Ferdinand changes and evolves just like Harlequin who in the *commedia dell'arte* becomes Pierrot. From a passive husband attending flashy receptions he becomes Pierrot – Marianne's mad lover. He is closer to Pierrot or Harlequin due to the fact that he writes and turns into a tragicomic author whose diary describes his equally tragicomic life. In this manner he starts to resemble Pierrot as a poet from a French children's song²⁴.

Finally, yet another similarity between the Italian comedy and the *tragicomedy dell'arte* realised, however, not within the diegesis of the film but due to the specific function fulfilled by the director, Jean-Luc Godard, who in the context of the *tragicomedy dell'arte* became its initiator and director performing the part of the *concertatore* supervising the play. In this capacity Godard also proposed the *scenario*, in which, according to Nicoll, he sketched the plot and determined its climax²⁵. First and foremost, Godard was the author of the screenplay to *Pierrot le fou* (borrowing only little from a novel by Lionel White). We are entitled to assume that the scenario was not particularly detailed since numerous scenes appear to be improvised (just like the *lazzi* in *commedia dell'arte*, barely marked in the *scenario*). Moreover, Godard-*concertatore* took care that the key scenes were sufficiently

accentuated so that eventually they could transmit meanings granted by the director (in the same way the *concertatore* distinguished elements of the plot).

Ferdinand-Pierrot is no longer a mere protagonist of the *tragicomedy dell'arte*. As a comedian, he becomes the participant of events transpiring in a strange and grotesque world, which Storey described as *le monde pierrotique*²⁶. Pierrot strides a world that is recalcitrant and bizarre²⁷. This is also the way Ferdinand behaves when he begins to live *as if in an adventure story*. His entire activity seems to stem from a curious (although probably unconscious) need to fill the surrounding world with original events and words. This specific *horror vacui* is the reason why the essence of the acts carried out by Ferdinand-Pierrot – all those thefts, assaults, heists and murders – is a multiplication of a clown's jokes. Ferdinand's journey to the south of France constantly supplies him with new opportunities for performing *lazzi*. His conduct assumes clownish features. When it produces only laughter it becomes a clown's performance; moments later it is an ordinary masquerade (the theatrical scene enacted in a port by Ferdinand and Marianne wearing Vietnamese and American costumes). As a rule, however, Ferdinand proves to be the protagonist of a Harlequinade, a comical and tragic, grotesque and ironic *Pierrotade à la Godard*. Pierrot envisaged by Jean-Luc Godard proves to be the servant of Death²⁸ (he kills Marianne), but also its victim (after all, he too will soon die). He is naive and pitiful, embroiled in a sequence of tragicomic situations crowned by his absurd demise. The *Pierrotade* in which he participates or rather which he creates possesses a specific Godardesque character. After all, not always did Pierrot's sad adventures end in his death. *Pierrot le fou* produces such a tangle of various circumstances that the only possible conclusion of the main protagonist's story proves to be his death (just as in classical tragedy). This is why the *Pierrotade* constructed by Ferdinand is a *Pierrotade à la Godard* – it runs its course and ends in accordance with the poetic of this director's films.

Finally, here is Mikhail Bakhtin: *Popular masks (...) never perish: not a single plot in Atellan, Italian or Italianized French comedies provides for, or could ever provide for, the actual death of a Maccus, a Pulcinello or a Harlequin. However, one frequently witnesses their fictive comic deaths (with subsequent resurrections). These are heroes of free improvisation and not heroes of tradition, heroes of a life process that is imperishable and forever renewing itself, forever contemporary – these are not heroes of an absolute past*²⁹.

Endnotes

- ¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Epic and Novel*, in: idem, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, transl. Caryl Emmerson, Michael Holquist, Austin – London 1981, p. 36.
- ² Ibidem.
- ³ Robert F. Storey, *Pierrot. A Critical History of a Mask*, Princeton 1978, p. 15.
- ⁴ Cf. ibidem, p. 17.

- ⁵ Ibidem, p. 114.
- ⁶ Cf. ibidem, p. 22.
- ⁷ Arthur Symons, *Aubrey Beardsley*, London 1898, pp. 20-21.
- ⁸ Ibidem, p. 21.
- ⁹ The use of the expression "product of the theatre" is intentional since *commedia dell'arte* is not drama *sensu stricto* and a written play but rather the product of the actor, the costume designer or the stage machinist.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Julian Lewański, *O komedii żywej*, introduction to: Konstanty Miklaszewski, *Komedia dell'arte, czyli teatr komediantów włoskich XVI, XVII, XVIII wieku*, transl. Sława and Michał Browiński, Wrocław 1961, p. 5.
- ¹¹ Allardyce Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia Dell'Arte*, Cambridge 1963, p. 84. Cf. also: Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre: A Study of Theatrical Art from the Beginnings to the Present Day*, New York 1927, p. 108.
- ¹² Konstanty Miklaszewski, op. cit., pp. 51-53.
- ¹³ Example after: Robert F. Storey, op. cit., p. 27.
- ¹⁴ Allardyce Nicoll, *World Drama: From Aeschylus to Anouilh*, New York 1961, p. 197.
- ¹⁵ Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*, op. cit., p. 107.
- ¹⁶ Robert F. Storey, op. cit., p. 25.
- ¹⁷ Konstanty Miklaszewski, op. cit., p. 81.
- ¹⁸ *Arte* in Italian means not only art but also: skill, profession, handiwork.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Konstanty Miklaszewski, op. cit., p. 110.
- ²⁰ Ibidem, p. 116.
- ²¹ Cf. Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*, op. cit., p. 108.
- ²² *Ange déchu*.
- ²³ Storey listed titles and quotes from books confirming Pierrot's condition as a Romantic fond of the mood of a moonlit night (with a slight dose of irony), e.g. the title of the play by Nolant de Fatouville: *Arlequin, empereur dans la lune* (op. cit., p. 24) or the words of Pierrot from another drama: *I could never be such a fool as to agree that the moon is a world. The moon, the moon! Morbleu! And the moon no bigger than an omelette of eight eggs!* (op. cit., p. 25).
- ²⁴ The lyrics of this song depict a sad and despondent clown-poet:
*Au clair de la lune
 Mon ami Pierrot
 Prête-moi ta plume
 Pour écrire un mot.
 Ma chandelle est morte
 Je n'ai plus de feu.
 Ouvre-moi ta porte
 Pour l'amour de Dieu.*
- ²⁵ Cf. Allardyce Nicoll, *The Development of the Theatre*, op. cit., p. 105. Cf. also: Guy Braucourt, "Pierrot le fou" *ou les héros de Jean-Luc Godard*, "Études cinématographiques" 1967, vol. 57-61, no. 59; Konrad Eberhardt, *Jean-Luc Godard*, Warszawa 1970.
- ²⁶ Robert F. Storey, op. cit., p. 73.
- ²⁷ Cf. ibidem.
- ²⁸ Robert F. Storey suggested this function was also fulfilled by Pierrot by referring to the title of Champfleury's *Pierrot, valet de la Mort* (op. cit., p. 114).
- ²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit., p. 36.

The Work and the “Boundary of Meaning”

Paul Claudel wrote in his *Journal* from 1910 that it is important to always possess a strong feeling of reality and hard facts. This statement could be referred to assorted life situations. But Claudel was thinking of a special state of affairs: the stand assumed by the artist and his task. The word “reality” must at this stage bring to mind yet another note made by the poet four years earlier, when he wrote that he had been thinking not of a reality accessible to our senses but a “total reality of things visible and invisible”, the base of truly universal poetry.

Claudel returned to this reflection upon many occasions, i.a. in *Positions et propositions*, published in 1928, when he announced that the matter of poetry are not dreams, illusions or thoughts but sacred reality, in which we are enrooted for always: a universe of the visible to which Faith grants a universe of the invisible, all that gazes at us and which we contemplate. All is the work of God, lauded by the songs and poems of the greatest poets as well as the songs of the most modest of birds. *Poesis perennis* does not devise its themes but incessantly returns to those suggested by Creation, in the manner of our liturgy, of which we never tire just as we do not grow weary of the seasons of the year. The purpose of poetry is not, as Baudelaire maintained, to reach the bottom of Infinity in order to discover novelty but, on the contrary, to attain the bottom of the finite so as to arrive at that, which is inexhaustible. In a travesty of Jesus: *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth* (Matthew 12,30; Luke 11,23) Claudel added that only truth links and connects all, while all that, which is not truth, disperses.

We accept that an authentic work of art discloses or at least intends to reveal or render closer that, which in a domain other than reflection on art is described as the boundary of meaning. This term comes from the philosophy of religion or, to put it as extensively as possible, the study of religion. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology* by Gerardus van der Leeuw disseminated this term, borrowing it from a today already less known work, namely, *Types of Men* by Eduard Springer (published in 1914), who wrote that the religious meaning of things is the one beyond which no further or more profound meaning may hide. This is the sense of entirety, the last word. Such meaning, however, will be never comprehended and such a word will be never uttered. They shall always remain above us. Ultimate sense is an ever-revealed mystery that, however, keeps on being concealed. It denotes a path leading to the ultimate boundary where only one thing is comprehended: all understanding remains “on the other side”. Ultimate sense is thus the very limit of meaning.

Karen Blixen died in 1962. Immediately before she said in an interview given on Danish Radio, i. a. that inspiration is composed predominantly of all experiences comprising a unity thanks to which that, which

we usually find so difficult to understand suddenly becomes lucid and appears to have been bestowed upon us in the manner of a gift.

An excellent commentary to this statement is a fragment from a biography by the writer Judith Thurman, who noted: the sentence “I understood everything” or “suddenly, I comprehended everything” appears in the writings of Karen Blixen almost as a liturgical formula. It signifies an awareness of the great mystery that each one of us carries within, buried in the past and now suddenly discovered, describing moments that disclose the very skeleton of our identity.

This sketch is an outcome of attempts at commenting on *Babette’s Feast* (*Babette’s gaestebud*, 1987), Gabriel Axel’s film adaptation of a novel written by Karen Blixen in English in 1950. The novel was included in *Anecdotes of Destiny*, a collection issued in 1953.

Babette’s Feast occupies an exceptional place in the *oeuvre* of Karen Blixen: it is her masterpiece or belongs to a group of her most complete works. Axel’s film, a faithful transposition of the original, attains the same extremely high level, so rare in cinematographic art. It is and will undoubtedly remain one of the masterpieces of film. Nonetheless, due to the fact that as befits a masterpiece it is known to a rather narrow audience it seems necessary to propose at the very onset the simplest possible and, unfortunately, rather abridged introduction at least to its theme.

In the story the plot takes place in the small Norwegian port town of Berlevaag. The film transferred it to Denmark and a seacoast village in the northern part of a peninsula. Here, probably at the beginning of the 1920s, lived a pastor who in time gathered disciples or believers from among simple fishermen and sailors. Certain features of this congregation could point to the impact of Swedenborg. At this stage, however, it suffices to add that the movement aimed at a revival of religious life, initiated by the pastor, spread across the country, gaining followers among the high strata of the nobility and at the royal court.

The pastor married late and soon became a widower. Alone, he brought up two daughters, Martina and Philippa, christened after Luther and Melancton. Their upbringing must have been stern; moreover, the pastor did not want the girls to leave home, declaring that their assistance would be always indispensable in view of his vocation. The daughters did not protest, but upon two occasions the extraordinary beauty and enchanting voice of the younger one disturbed the unruffled course of their life.

First there appeared at the pastor's house Lorens Loewenhielm, a young officer from a well-born family, in love with Martina. He had gained access thanks to a pious aunt, a long-time supporter of the pastor's activity whose country residence was located nearby. The young man, however, soon understood that he would be unable to win over the girl and after telling her that he found out for the first time that fate is cruel and that there are certain impossible things in the world, he left for always – or so it seemed at the time.

Next there arrived on a sightseeing tour a brilliant French singer, Achille Papin, who had just performed at the Royal Opera in Stockholm. Having seen Philippa and heard her astonishing voice in church he decided to share his life and career with her. He succeeded only insofar as the pastor permitted him to give the young girl several singing lessons. Philippa, however, resigned from them, evidently uncertain about her feelings for the teacher.

Many years later, Achille wrote a letter to the sisters requesting that they would take the person delivering it, a certain Babette Hersant, under their care. At the time of the Paris Commune Babette had lost her husband and son and was forced to flee from France. Her nephew, working on a ship belonging to the Scandinavian fleet, could take her along. Achille Papin recalled the pastor's home and presented her with a letter of recommendation informing that Babette was an excellent cook. The two sisters, living very modestly (their father had passed away a long time ago), devoted all their funds to charity and thus concluded that they could not afford a housekeeper. Babette pleaded to permit her to stay and work free of charge, claiming that this was the last chance in her life. The sisters were compelled to relent.

Upon a certain occasion Babette mentioned that the only bond with her homeland was a lottery ticket purchased a long time ago and renewed yearly by one of her Parisian friends. More than ten years after having settled down in her new place of residence she received the news that she had won the first prize: 10 000 francs. This event coincided with the hundredth anniversary of the pastor's birth, which his daughters intended to celebrate. Babette convinced them to allow her to cook a French-style dinner on that day, for which she would pay with her winnings. Having over-

come their doubts, Martina and Philippa consented, especially considering that this was Babette's first request and, they believed, the last one before her now likely departure for France. Babette had become rich and, in their opinion, the cost of a single reception would not affect her resources.

Despite considerable anxiety caused by the scale and type of purchases preceding the dinner, the evening was a success. Even more so since it especially impressed, and was appreciated by a totally unexpected guest announced almost at the last moment. This was Lorens Loewenhielm, now a retired general, who had enjoyed an imposing career and for years represented his country at the court of St. Petersburg and Paris.

The striking features of both the novel and the film are unusually concise narration and the simplicity of all applied means. This simplicity and aptness serve, already on the outside, the essential expressive effect of the whole dramatic construction, basically identical in both works and granting the illusion of reality to things and events that are by no means obvious but puzzling and uncommon. That which should be regarded as openly improbable is rendered credible in assorted ways, one of them being the precisely defined historical quality of facts. We know, for instance, that the closing and, at the same time, main link of the plot takes place on 15 December 1885 and thus that the pastor was born in 1785. We also learn that Martina was born in 1836 and Philippa – in 1837, that Lorens paid his first visit to the pastor's house in 1854, and that Achille Papin came a year later, that Babette arrived in 1871, etc.

This whole network of dates, given directly or easily recreated, aims, first and foremost, at rendering real all those unlikely coincidences that bring to mind an intervention of supernatural forces and that in a rational order should be regarded either as confabulation or a challenge to faith.

On the other hand, fate or Providence reveals its power through an improbable symmetry of events. All the sequences aim at a single point designated by the dinner given by Babette. Unfulfilled feelings and crossed plans are realized, disclosing their concealed order and meaning, becoming ultimately the reason for an explanation of the central event and finding their elucidation within it. In this manner, the despotic nature of the pastor and his egocentrism, only ostensibly justified by noble vocation, are as if overcome and vanquished, but actually reveal themselves in the unexpected truth of their essential effects. The love of Lorens for Martina and of Achille for Philippa, timidly reciprocated but instantly stifled, now triumphs at a totally different level. Thanks to the singer Babette found herself at the home of the pastor's daughters. Owing to the general's seemingly accidental but necessary presence at the dinner table and the experiences that he pursued owing to failed love the greatness of

Babette's feast can be duly appreciated, since the meal is a great work of art and Babette - a remarkable artist. This is the way in which cards dealt by fate are shown. Suddenly, we decipher the heretofore-concealed plan and discover the essence of the game. The impact of grace can ultimately come to the fore *via* the artwork and in a place created by the latter.

General Loewenhielm rises to say a single sentence: *But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite.*

In this fashion we discover the topic of *Babette's Feast*, its theme and most profound contents. This is a story about a work of art and the revelation of grace – something that might be described as *coup de grâce*, if this expression were to be freed of its idiomatic meaning

Let us repeat: according to *Babette's Feast* a work of art describes and as if discloses the place that is to be struck by the "bolt of grace".

Each of the two motifs ("religious" and "artistic") of the story and, naturally, the film, can be separated more clearly only at an analytical level, possesses to a certain extent separate signs of recognition, and contrasts with the other.

The text of *Babette's Feast* is full of open or concealed - at times travestied – Biblical quotations. Members of the pastor's congregation at times speak in the words of the Bible (e.g. the story about the cluster of grapes comes from *The Book of Numbers*, and about the treacherous nature of language - from *The Epistle of St. James*). The theme from Psalm 85: *Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other* recurs several times. One of the hymns sung by the congregation and composed, as we learn, by the pastor alludes to sentences repeated by St. Matthew (7, 9-10) and St. Luke (11, 11): *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son asks bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?* It is said that Babette was the dark Martha in the house of two fair Marys. The feast is associated with two New Testament events - the Wedding at Cana and the Pentecost, the second being recalled as follows: *Of what happened later in the evening, nothing definite here can be stated. None of the guests later on had any clear remembrance of it. They only knew that the rooms had been filled with a heavenly light, as if a number of small halos had blended into one glorious radiance. Taciturn old people received the gift of tongues; ears that for years had been almost deaf were opened to it. Time itself had merged into eternity. Long after midnight, the windows of the house shone like gold, and golden song flowed out into the winter air.*

At the onset Babette and the theme of artistic creativity are defined by a sombre ambiance. Karen Blixen (as well as Axel and the brilliant Stephane Audran playing the part of Babette) masterfully outlines a portrait of the protagonist: simple and obvious, puzzling and undefined, full of unexpected possibilities inces-

santly revealed and realised. Into the world formed by the pastor Babette introduced multi-faceted outlandishness derived from her biography, customs, language and religion. She does not demonstrate this trait but also does not reject it. At the same time, she enters a totally new environment and almost blends with it while remaining essentially mysterious and unknown. When the circumstances allow her to disclose that what she regards as most important – her vocation and talent, there emerges also something that defines her strangeness to the very end: some sort of a pagan feature containing the idea and form of an offering.

The originally blurred outlines of this form give rise to fear and outrage among everyone. In a single moment, the whole trust that had been bestowed upon Babette for the past fourteen years disappears and someone even proposes to ignore her suspicious and undoubtedly sinful gift and to treat it with silence and indifference. At that particular moment no one, and up to the end almost no one infers an offering in the French women's caprice or is capable of assessing its dimensions.

In contrast to the obvious grace suffusing the contents of the life of the pastor's daughters Babette's offering is - not only ostensibly - dark, impenetrable, violent and cruel. Regardless of the sophistication that ultimately comes to the fore in its outcome, its sources contain something primeval. First and foremost, it is again due to this trait that the offering is "pagan". At this stage, the film by Gabriel Axel adds something to that, which Karen Blixen merely suggested and which at first glance appears to be fleeting. The sequence of preparations for the feast shows mounds of slaughtered animals; next, we watch many other first-hand testimonies of unrestrained extravagance, the end result being an image of frenzied wastage and destruction, a "potlatch" in which, as it turns out at the end, the sum of 10 000 francs, enormous at the time, simply vanishes.

This "pagan" character of the feast, which, as has been mentioned, became apparent rather prior to the feast than in its course, compels us to regard Babette's offering in religious categories. In this context, "pagan" means primarily "cult", "religious" and belonging to a different religious order than the one universally prevalent in the given environment.

In the novel the image of the feast is humbler than in the film and apart from the story about the gigantic turtle, which appears in the kitchen and terrifies Martha, it says little about the backstage preparations. The general recognises and admires the brands and vintage of the wines. He also knows the particular dishes: turtle soup, blinis *Demidoff* and *cailles en sarcophage*, the latter being the trademark of Babette Hersant and her artistry at the Parisian "Café Anglais" restaurant famous for her cuisine. In the story Lorens Loewenhielm reminisces but does not exteriorise his recollections. In the film, on the other hand, he speaks but his remarks do not

produce any sort of reaction or understanding among the listeners. In both cases, therefore, data that would make it possible to finally unveil the mystery of the feast, i.e. to identify Babette, are not associated. The general never saw her in Paris nor will he see her here. He recognizes the work, which he once admired but does not attempt to deduce by what miracle it had made its way to the pastor's home. In a certain sense his reaction is correct: he distrusts sensual evidence and succumbs to that, which he regards as improbable and thus cannot be considered "real" according to commonly observed rigours. In doing so, he accepts the order into which he had been introduced, although he is unable to explain it.

General Loewenhielm stopped eating and sat immovable. Once more he was carried back to that dinner in Paris of which he had thought in the sledge. An incredibly recherche and palatable dish had been served there; he had asked its name from his fellow diner, Colonel Galliffet, and the Colonel had smilingly told him that it was named "Cailles en Sarcophage". He further told him that the dish had been invented by the chef off the very café in which they were dining, a person known all over Paris as the greatest culinary genius of the age and – most surprisingly – a woman! "And indeed", said Colonel Galliffet, "this woman is now turning a dinner at the Café Anglais into a kind of love affair – inot a love affair of the noble and romantic category in which one no longer distinguishes between bodily and spiritual appetite or satiety!

The term "romantic" used here is by all means justified. The cited dialogue should be situated somewhere at the turn of the fifth decade of the nineteenth century. Romanticism, devised as an artistic current, was still alive and although its tide was declining and becoming dispersed it grew increasingly universal. Mentioning *cailles en sarcophage* Karen Blixen described the stylistic features of Babette's work and evoked the historical-archaeological predilections of the period as well as its macabre-grotesque inclination towards "creating an atmosphere". The name of the dish contains all: from subjection to fashion to the use in culinary art of inspirations stemming from the great spiritual discoveries of the epoch. Moreover, let us add, it again suggests some sort of a cult ceremony, a ritual and an offering.

The speech given by General Loewenhielm disclosing the moral and religious meaning of Babette's feast is preceded by a brief comment on the impact of wine. Once more we come across an echo of *The Acts of the Apostles*. The miracle of glossolalia that occurred on the day of the Pentecost was commented in two ways by those gathered around the supper table (2,12-13): *And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

The novel similarly justifies and appears to use rational arguments to hide the general's irrational behav-

our. For all practical purposes, we may perceive the influence of some sort of inspiration stemming from unidentified sources. But, as we had already mentioned, the narrator prefers to remain firmly on the ground: *Then the General felt that the time had come to make a speech. He rose and stood up very straight. Nobody else at the dinner table had stood up to speak. The old people lifted their eyes to the face above them in high, happy expectation. They were used to seeing sailors and vagabonds dead drunk with the crass gin of the country, but they did not recognize in a warrior and courtier the intoxication brought about by the noblest wine of the world. "Mercy and truth, my friends, have met together," said the General. "Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another"*.

He spoke in a clear voice, which had been trained in drill grounds and had echoed sweetly in royal halls, and yet he was speaking in a manner so new to himself and so strangely moving that after his first sentence he had to make a pause. For he was in the habit of forming his speeches with care, conscious of his purpose, but here, in the midst of the Dean's simple congregation, it was as if the whole figure of General Loewenhielm, his breast covered with decorations, were but a mouthpiece for a message which meant to be brought forth.

"Man, my friends," said General Loewenhielm, "is frail and foolish. We have all of us been told that grace is to be found in the universe. But in our human foolishness and short-sightedness we imagine divine grace to be finite. For this reason we tremble ..." Never till now had the General stated that he trembled; he was genuinely surprised and even shocked at hearing his own voice proclaim the fact. "We tremble before making our choice in life, and after having made it again tremble in fear of having chosen wrong. But the moment comes when our eyes are opened, and we see and realize that grace is infinite. Grace, my friends, demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it in gratitude. Grace, brothers, makes no conditions and singles out none of us in particular; grace takes us all to its bosom and proclaims general amnesty. See! that which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us. Ay, that which we have rejected is poured upon us abundantly. For mercy and truth have met together and righteousness and bliss have kissed one another".

This moment of illumination in which everything that the general had experienced in his life appeared as a "logical whole" now suddenly assumes meaning, reveals its deep sense and comes into being thanks to Babette's work. The feast, an artistic creation, delineates, as has been said, space that makes possible perception, experience and comprehension totally different from their "ordinary", common or pragmatic counterparts. A feast conceived as a work of art places its participants *vis a vis* complete reality revealing all its dimensions.

The densification and intensification of the sensual is such that it appears to undergo a crisis of sorts. On a daily basis, the firm cohesion of the visible cracks and ensuing fissures contain invisible perspectives of things, domains of "the invisible".

Such a work is attainable thanks to sacrifice. Each great work possesses something of an offering. It either is an offering or originates from it; similarly to the offering, it does not "communicate" anything to those who come into contact with it or, to put differently, those who find themselves within its range.

The probably most prominent message of *Babette's Feast* is contained in the discovery and process of rendering aware of the work of art both as the concentration and liberation of a certain force and energy that it would be most correct to describe as the force of the truth – such a work takes us into its possession, embraces us, and compels us to participate in it. It is impossible, therefore, to speak about the reception and recipients of that, which has taken place and emerged in the act of creation. *Babette's Feast* shows how regardless of "competence" and even of will, willingness and resolutions the work captivates those who had been drawn into its orbit. And how regardless of experience, knowledge, and even the state of consciousness it allows and forces to see that, which it cannot indicate even indirectly or ostensibly: to see "total reality" and the "sense of the whole", to reach the "boundary of meaning". When Lorenz Loewenhielm speaks about grace and Babette admits that if she offered all that she could give then she offered others perfect happiness they are both expressing the same: experiencing an infinite, limitless whole.

That which we have chosen is given us, and that which we have refused is, also and at the same time, granted us.

Let us repeat: great art is the reason why we become its substance, the "matter" of its works.

The novel and the film end with a conversation containing a unique and artistically important creed. In this case, the text of the novel is much more extensive than the film version of the dialogue.

Martina says: "We will all remember this evening when you have gone back to Paris, Babette".

Babette said: "I am not going back to Paris".

"You are not going back to Paris?" Martine exclaimed.

"No," said Babette. "What will I do in Paris? They have all gone. I have lost them all, Mesdames".

The sisters' thoughts went to Monsieur Hersant and his son, and they said: "Oh, my poor Babette".

"Yes, they have all gone", said Babette. "The Duke of Morny, the Duke of Decazes, Prince Narishkine, General Gallifet, Aurélien Scholl, Paul Daru, the Princes Pauline! All! "

The strange names and titles of people lost to Babette faintly confused the two ladies, but there was such an infinite perspective of tragedy in her announcement

that in their responsive state of mind they felt her losses as their own, and their eyes filled with tears.

At the end of another long silence Babette suddenly smiled slightly at them and said: "And how would I go back to Paris, Mesdames? I have no money".

"No money?" the sisters cried as with one mouth.

"No" said Babette.

"But the ten thousand francs? The sisters asked in a horrified gasp.

"The ten thousand francs have been spent, Mesdames", said Babette. [...]

The ladies still did not find a word to say. The piece of news was incomprehensible to them, but then many things tonight in one way or another had been beyond comprehension [...]

"Dear Babette", she said softly, "you ought not to have given away all you had for our sake".

Babette gave her mistress a deep glance, a strange glance. Was there not pity, even scorn, at the bottom of it?

"For your sake?" she replied. "No. For my own".

She rose from the chopping block and stood up before the two sisters.

"I am a great artist!" she said.

She waited a moment and then repeated: "I am a great artist, Mesdames".

Again for a long time there was deep silence in the kitchen. Then Martine said: "So you will be poor now all your life, Babette?"

"Poor?" said Babette. *She smiled as if to herself. "No. I shall never be poor. I told you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing. [...]*

"But all those people whom you had mentioned," she said, "those princes and great people of Paris whom you named, Babette? You yourself fought against them. You were a Communard! The general you named had your husband and son shot! How can you grieve over them?"

Babette's dark eyes met Philippa's. "Yes", she said, "I was a Communard. [...]. And those people I named, Mesdames, were evil and cruel [...]. But all the same, Mesdames, I shall not go back to Paris, now that those people of whom I have spoken are no longer there". [...]. "You see, Mesdames [...]. those people belonged to me, they were mine. They had been brought up and trained, with greater expense than you, my little ladies, could ever imagine or believe, to understand what a great artist I am. I could make them happy. When I did my very best I could make them perfectly happy". [...]. "It was like that with Monsieur Papin too" [...]. "He told me so himself: 'It is terrible and unbearable to an artist,' he said, 'to be encouraged to do, to be applauded for doing, his second best'. He said: 'Through all the world there goes one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me leave to do my utmost!'"

The Eternal Moment. On *Babette's Feast*

Everything in Gabriel Axel's work appears to be ostensibly simple, unambiguous and does not call for additional statements, commentaries and even more so analytical undertakings. The simple story about the life of a Protestant religious sect starts with a fairy-tale motif, legible to everyone: *In this remote spot there once lived two sisters who were both past the first flush of youth. They had been christened Martina and Philippa.*¹ The story recounted in the film can be rather easily and precisely summarized. It is at this stage, however, that obstacles emerge and it becomes obvious that that, which is essential and quite possibly could constitute the most fundamental content is concealed "under" an external form, "underneath" the plot. We feel that beneath the anecdotal stratum an excess additional meaning of sorts, something that cannot be subjected to formulas introducing ambiguity is peering at us. On the other hand, we come across surprisingly infantile opinions such as the assessment made by a certain British critic who with disarming sincerity announced that this is a film about French cuisine.² Although it is impossible to negate that the titular feast dominates the plot, treating it purely as a visual appendix to *Physiologie du goût* (The Physiology of Taste) by Anthelm Brillat-Savarin³ is more than a commonplace misunderstanding. This mode of deciphering is based on purely external, superficial perception, which, as a result, produces total abuse of the intention of the film text.

I recall the scene of the feast because I would like to focus my attention predominantly on it. Among the several motifs that deserve to be discussed separately (the encounter of different cultures, mentalities, religious expressions; the theme of grace and designation; the role and vocation of the artist; the sense of art) I have selected the long sequence of the feast since this example will make it possible to demonstrate, probably most distinctly, the declared multi-strata quality, ambiguity, and semantic non-transparency of the film, and to extract its symbolic dimension. I would like to come closer to the meanings contained in the scene

of the feast by evoking others, semantically adjacent, although not necessarily merely film texts and imagery in order to avoid the mentioned interpretation simplifications and reductions. Casting light on the film image by resorting to similar ones also provides another cognitive merit – without violating its autonomy it makes it feasible to discern the connections, affiliations, and correspondences occurring between divergent and widely comprehended "texts" of culture. In the case of a different approach, capturing such similarities and analogies would be hampered if not outright rendered impossible. It must be added that the strata of meanings distinguished here for the sake of analytical lucidity actually create a single indivisible whole within the structure of the work.

*

Before it becomes apparent that Babette won 10 000 francs in a lottery and that she intended to spend the whole sum for preparing an elaborate French dinner that was to add splendour to a meeting held on the hundredth anniversary of the birth of a pastor, a founder of a sect, that day was originally to be a modest, *par excellence* religious ceremony, a renewal of the confession of faith. After the pastor's death, his followers, under the organizational and spiritual supervision of his two daughters, met every year *to read and interpret the Word (...)*. *In the yellow house they felt that their Master's spirit was with them; here they were at home and at peace.*

Year after year, the community founded by him diminished, and controversies and disagreements between its members multiplied. On the day of the hundredth anniversary of his birth, twelve most loyal disciples sat at a table, recalling the words often uttered by him: *Above all, love each other deeply ... For mercy and truth have met together and righteousness and bliss have kissed one another*, and the wonderful events from his life: *Indeed, it was almost a miracle (...)* *when our minister had promised to conduct a Christmas sermon... at the church across the fjord? For two weeks the weather had been so bad (...) that no captain or fisherman would risk the crossing. The villagers had given up all hope.*

The minister told them if no boat would take him he would walk across to them on the waves. And behold, three days before Christmas the storm abated. A cold spell set in and the fjord froze from shore to shore. And this had never happened before in any man's memory. (Cf. Matthew 14,22-33; Mark 6,45-52; John 6,16-21). This part of the feast, filled with reminiscences of the disciples, resembles a commemorative rite. Memory endows existence, renders the absent present. It is the reason why the person depicted in a portrait hanging on a wall is truly present amongst his gathered followers. The whole fragment reveals a familiar image: a table, a meal partaken jointly by twelve men, with the Master and Teacher in their midst. The true prefigu-

ration of this scene is the Last Supper. Must we add more and develop the obvious typological equation: Christ and pastor, Master and teacher? The one who ordered his community to congregate and recall the evangelical message, and the One who said: *Do this do in remembrance of me* (Luke 22,19)? *Babette's Feast* is one of the few films (and possibly the only one) in which a precise and almost veristic imitation, in the profound etymological meaning of the word (Latin: *imitare* – to imitate, to recreate), of the Last Supper takes place. We are dealing with an exact reversal of a memorable scene from Buñuel's *Viridiana*, where the titular protagonists, remaining faithful to the evangelical directive; *But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind* (Luke 14,13), invite twelve paupers from the vicinity, who take their place at a table laden with food and beverages (the iconographic model of the scene is Leonardo's *Last Supper*). This meal ends with general drunkenness and pandemonium – a parodistic and blasphemous version of the evangelical supper, the Last Supper *à rebours*.

Suggesting a symbolic equivalence between the Last Supper and the ceremonious meal shared by a religious community I have neglected to mention the words crowning the Good Thursday meeting of the disciples and Master: *Take, eat: this is my body and: This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many* (Mark 14,22, 14,24) – words that establish the sacrament of the Eucharist and anticipate the sacrifice of the Cross.

At which point does the film refer to the offering of flesh and blood? Does it contain a suggestion concerning the motif of sacrificing life for the sake of others? An allusion to this theme appears in a scene that apparently possesses only anecdotal meaning. Let us recall the moment when Babette, having gathered the necessary ingredients, starts to cook while watched in the kitchen by one of the sisters, who a moment later withdraws in horror. At night, Martine dreams of an ox head on fire and a turtle in swirling red smoke, of smiling Babette offering a cup of wine (blood?), which spills and stains the white tablecloth, and, finally, of an etching depicting a witch-death brandishing a scythe and mounted on a foam-covered steed. The entire sequence is maintained in a rather buffo tone (the oneiric image only enhances its grotesque nature) and appears to be deprived of greater meaning. Nonetheless, there is something that compels us to pay closer attention: death and blood. More precisely: the death and blood of a living creature composed of flesh slaughtered and devoured.

In what sense can we speak about sacrifice in this particular case? Are we not abusing the concept by referring it to a phenomenon so obvious, ordinary, and outright trivial as eating meat? In a text to which I would like to refer this problem is, so to speak, placed

on a knife-edge. In her extraordinary, poignant, and existentialistic essay Jolanta Brach-Czaina embarked upon the meaning of eating live creatures and discovered an entirely new perspective of perceiving the elementary (and thus forgotten) fact of our carnivorous nature.⁴ *The character of our community is determined by its carnivorous character. Almost anything can be nourishment but meat is composed of flesh and blood. It is a total offering. In this sense we belong to a community of blood, since when one life vanishes another life is preserved in this union. Existence, which appears be a supreme value, lasts thanks to the ultimate sacrifice, which is taken rather than voluntarily made by the person offering himself. This blood communion shatters the illusion of determinants as features upon which we could base reflections about our condition or fate. Fate is shared and justly levelled in the existential sphere. The offering is made regardless whether that, which is regarded inferior is sacrificed for the sake of the superior, or vice versa, whether that which is regarded superior is offered for the sake of that, which it despises. Man is an insect to his fellow man. We cannot exist without each other, we cannot desist from destroying each other, we cannot exist without offering ourselves for the sake of another (...). When death comes we should think gratefully about all those creatures that we ate in the course of our life because they were an offering that served our existence. We should pray to those creatures. And tell the successive ones: eat! this is my body and blood.*⁵

This is the way in which the incessant, eternally repeated and multiplied phenomenon of eating corporeal beings, other beings, becomes justified. The theodicy of meat becomes established. In a successive paragraph, just as astounding and revealing as the already cited fragments, there comes to the fore a motif recurring throughout the whole text – the metaphysical dimension of our carnivorous nature: *The metaphysics of meat forces us to change the traditional attitude to the eternal and the temporary. We have grown accustomed to regarding eternal existence as particularly desired, as an especially high value. As a rule, it was an attribute ascribed to the Absolute, and thus to that, which is the most precious. Meanwhile, observation of meatiness convinces us that the endless continuum of existence is universally given and banal on a daily basis. We cannot get rid of it. External existence is cleverly and perversely attached to existence in the form of change. It is upheld by the omnipotent force of ambivalence and it is not the point whether the existence of existence could one day break down and end, or not. This is something we do not know. The heart of the matter involves that, which the meatiness of existence tells us. Nothing ends. Quite possibly, therefore, whatever we do continues to exist in some way. And quite possibly it does not really matter that it continues to exist. It is infinite existence that is inalienably given together with meatiness. In other words, it should not become the goal of our struggle, efforts and endeavours, since from the viewpoint of*

meatiness it is its indisputable trait. It is worth making an effort about each invaluable, extraordinary moment, the ultimate value of each passing shape of our existence. From the vantage point of meatiness supreme and absolute value should be attributed to momentary individual form, due to which meatiness changes; and it is not worth even paying attention to eternity – it exists in meatiness. Let us take a look at the moment whose shape is endowed by someone's presence next to us. (Why do we do this so rarely?). It is invaluable. And now for the moment whose shape is granted by someone's non-existence. It too is an invaluable moment – that of pain. Meatiness thus directs our attention towards the absolute concealed in particular moments, in unique shapes through which it moves and changes. Our task – it seems to follow – would thus consist of the skill of experiencing the ultimate value of each moment and, on the other hand, of bestowing upon it the absolute value established by us. The object of our particular concern and greatest longings, therefore, should not be eternity but the moment negating it⁶ (all emphasis – D.C.).

I cite long fragments of the essay and compare them to *Babette's Feast* for two reasons. First, due to the presence of the motif of the offering recurring in the film in various scenes and possessing assorted meanings. Secondly, owing to the dialectic of the moment and eternity portrayed in such a surprising light, a motif that will be developed in relation to this film at yet another level. I believe that it is precisely those two "themes" that permeate the entire film story, organize the matter of the events, and comprise their "hidden" sense.

Return to the film, if only for a moment – to those sensual and highly enticing frames featuring a fruit bowl next to a bottle of wine, slices of fresh raw meat, a set table, a white tablecloth and on it glistening silverware. The undefined feeling of *déjà vu* accompanying the process of watching or, more precisely, savouring these almost autonomous images changes momentarily into certainty in view of what has been served: we are reminded of still-life canvases. I recall them at this precise stage not only due to automatic, self-imposed associations. It is with their assistance (and upon a select example) that I would like to demonstrate, before we once again interpret the scene of the feast, the way in which I comprehend its symbolic nature mentioned at the onset. What does this symbolic character of the feast designate? What is the meaning of the symbol? And what sort of symbol are we talking about?

It is worth stressing right at the onset that while speaking about still life I do not have in mind those realisations whose symbolic significance was deciphered with such iconographic sophistication by Ingvar Bergström, one of the most outstanding experts on the topic.⁷ In order to comprehend the way in which I interpret the symbolic character of the still life (more exactly: its particular variety) and symbolic in general

one must for a moment suspend – but not abandon – the most frequent habit of the ethnologist and art historian, according to which a symbol refers to a certain object, person, concept, or idea upon the basis of socially established convention. An excellent example of thus understood symbolic are *vanitas* still life compositions with recurring skulls, hourglasses, soap bubbles, snuffed out candles, butterflies, flies and insects legible at the moment of their creation (today we do not always comprehend their symbolic sense and require the assistance of an iconologist), symbols of the inevitable passage of time, vanity, and death.⁸ The same is true of the examples of "disguised symbolism" deciphered by Bergström in still lifes, a phenomenon meticulously analysed by Panofsky in reference to fifteenth-century Low Countries paintings.⁹ While interpreting a work by Jacob van Es, Bergström convincingly argued that the depicted elements of the world of Nature – a vine branch, an apple, two carnations – are actually a painterly story, an iconographic abbreviation of the Biblical story of redemption. They portray a transition from the original sin (an apple), the Incarnation of Christ (a carnation, whose multiple meanings could designate the Incarnation and/or Passion of Christ, a cluster of grapes – a reference to the person of Christ or the Eucharist) to the redemption of man by the sacrifice of the Cross.¹⁰

The description of the painting presented below takes us away from thus conceived symbolism by drawing attention to the possibility of another comprehension. I have in mind a composition by Juan Sánchez Cotán (1561-1627), a Spanish painter continuing a native tradition of the so-called *bodegón* (Spanish: *bodega* – a tavern or a pantry). This term was used to describe paintings showing edible objects: fruit and vegetables arranged in a special manner according to a previously devised conception. The account relates to a masterpiece of Spanish still life (and the genre as such) – *Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber* (in the collections of the San Diego Museum of Art, California): *The entire small painting opens up towards a rectangular niche in a thick wall, which could be an opening with frames and window panes, but then it would be a window opened towards darkness. A strong and intrusive light falls slightly from above, from the left. Within its brightness are arranged along a hyperbolic curve and according to a well measured rhythm a quince with two leaves, a head of cabbage, a melon cut open to the pits and its spherical particle and a cucumber whose shadowy end hangs beyond the edge of the table. (...) The painting expresses a harmony of things thoughtfully arranged in order and enveloped by mystery and the night. A discernible belief that the mysterious night on the other side of the window does not oppose the harmony of things but extracts it from within itself.*¹¹ Charles Sterling, an eminent expert on still life, wrote in a similar spirit about the Cotan painting, adding



that everything breathes highly intellectual art and a mystic fragrance.¹² In the Spanish master's composition stirring inner tension is built upon the basis of a confrontation within a single space of the illusionistically rendered, dominating and sensual surface of the depicted vegetables and fruits and the unreal aura of immobility and timelessness as if "not of this world". We participate in the halted moment and the silent and yet eloquent message of the composition¹³ by observing the sensual, the visible, and the temporal. That, which is spiritual, invisible, indiscernible, and eternal is surmised and anticipated. Both cited statements about Cotán's painting are an account of the existence of a certain surplus, that "something", which we feel is present in reality but cannot be expressed discursively. It reveals some sort of reality that is suggested and evoked; at the same time, it acts as an obstacle along the path of its complete actuation. Select researchers dealing with art and symbolic speak about the symbol and the symbolic work of art in a similar manner, i.e. by accentuating the same properties that we extracted in the Cotán canvas. Thanks to its extensive variety of references a work regarded as symbolic cries out: I would like to tell you more than I actually have done, and indicate something else than myself! Here, we may grasp the symbol even if we are incapable of offering a satisfactory explanation. The symbol is a constant qualm of our thought and experience. Hence the fact that a symbolic work proves to be more poignant and, so to speak, moves us more; this is also why it only rarely permits us to attain purely aesthetic pleasure.¹⁴ A universal comprehension of the symbol as independent and partly or relatively true is, for all practical purposes, false and insufficient since

the symbol is either something more or something less. If the symbol attains its goal then it is truly inseparable from that target – from the higher reality that it shows. If, however, it does not reveal such reality then it does not achieve its objective and hence one cannot perceive in it any sort of purposeful organisation and form; devoid of the latter it is not a symbol, an instrument of the spirit, but only material to be captured by the senses.¹⁵

Symbolic art without symbols accompanied by decipherable meanings is thus possible. What is the meaning of the cabbage or the melon in Cotán's canvas? To what meanings do they refer? What do they depict, present and symbolise, as we are in the habit of asking in such cases? They certainly do not designate or symbolise in the same way as the apple or the grapes in the Jacob van Es composition.¹⁶ Nor can they be conceptually analysed and explained. We shall not discover symbols of this sort in a dictionary of symbols. In the earlier presented conception of the symbol I accentuated the role of the cultural convention, but in the proposed perspective of interpreting the symbol emphasis should be placed upon its ability to suggest contents that cannot be grasped sensually and that are non-conceptual, upon the reality of the spiritual sphere to which it refers us, and upon the fact that they also contain a non-semantic aspect.¹⁷ Ultimately, we can say that the symbol according to the understanding, which we would like to discuss further on, is in its innermost foundations a mystical reality.

Dinner has been served; let us, therefore, return to the feast. The table features delicate turtle soup, blinis Demidoff, *amontillado*, champagne and superb wines – *Veuve Clicquot* (1845) and *Clos Veugeot* (1845) – and for dessert: luminescent juicy grapes, as if borrowed specially for this occasion from the canvases of Dutch still life masters. Amidst this opulence, a true feast for the eyes and the palate, the *clou* of the whole feast, a special delicacy, the outcome of Babette's creative ingenuity, her sign of recognition and signature, a brilliant wok of the culinary art: *Cailles en sarcophage*. (Note at this point, in a reference to comments on meat and sacrifice, that death once again makes its presence known in the very name of this dish, although upon this occasion it does so discreetly, as if diminished by metaphor. Cf. *sarks* – meat, *sarkophagos* – carnivore). A similarly lavishly laid table and an identical refined menu occurred earlier in the history of the cinema: kidneys *Bordelaise*, turkey served with chestnuts, *Charolais* beef with a mushroom cream sauce, oysters, crayfish *à la Mozart* on a bed of rice with sauce *Aurora*, etc.¹⁸ This is only a small fragment of the dishes in Ferreri's *La grande bouffe*. Against this backdrop *Babette's Feast* appears to be an "anti-feast" of sorts. The former meal consists of devouring food with gargantuan appetite, leading to the protagonists'



death, while the latter is composed of savouring and taking delight in assorted dishes and beverages. In the case of Ferreri refined dishes are pure externality and “mean” only themselves. Meat is meat, wine is wine, a gastrolological tautology devoid, so to speak, of all references. In *Babette's Feast* both the dishes and the very act of eating refer to experiences beyond smell and taste. It is simply impossible to imagine something more sensual and arousing the senses than crispy well-seasoned meat, fragrant wine, sparkling champagne and fruit simply dripping with juice. Nonetheless, the feast becomes a scene of a spiritualisation of the sensual. This transmutation takes place right in front of our eyes and there transpires a play of the sensual and the spiritual, the visible and the invisible. The general, the greatest gourmet among the diners, cites the words of his friend who described Babette, a former head cook at the Parisian Café Anglais: *The ability to transform a dinner into a kind of love affair, a love affair that made no distinction between bodily appetite and spiritual appetite.*

Babette spends all the money won in the lottery on cooking. Her deed cannot be explained in a causal, logical or rational order. This totally unselfish gesture stems from infinite devotion and does not expect anything in return. This is her gift. Her offering. It seems, however, that we have understood this “gift” at the base of the offering in an overly European and modern manner. We permitted ourselves to be misled by Ovid and forgot what it actually means: “to give”. *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts of the Apostles

20, 35). The *do-ut-des* theory has no place for such a formulation and assumes a totally different comprehension of giving or rather a completely dissimilar meaning of *do-ut-des*. Without doubt, this argument extremely often comprises the foundation of the offering. *Dare*, however, does not signify to present a certain object with an unclear purpose in mind. *Dare* means to establish a relation and thus to “take part” in another person with the help of a certain object, which actually is not an “object” but a part of man’s “I”. To “give” is to transfer a particle of oneself into the existence of someone else so that a permanent bond might come into being.¹⁹ Babette gives, offers to others the best part of herself – her culinary genius, artistry, and art, everything that she possesses. What is the nature of this offering and how should it be understood? Listen to a literary fragment, strangely matching the described situation: “*That’s why I do it for*”, she said, speaking aloud, to life. (...) *They’re an offering; which sounded horribly vague. (...) What did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-so in South Kensington; some one up in Bay-swater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quiet continuously a sense of their existence and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance.*²⁰ The quoted fragment comes from Virginia Woolf’s

Mrs. *Dalloway*. The image of the dinner rendered in it, as in many other texts, and of the party in *To the Lighthouse* by the same author appears to be a masterly literary commentary to the film feast.²¹ With their assistance it could be possible to disclose yet other strata of meanings in Axel's film. The party in *Mrs Dalloway* is not only the crowning of the plot, that particular point at which all events "aim", but also a culmination of supreme sense. In a similar manner, the whole seventeenth chapter of *To the Lighthouse*, composed of a dinner scene, emanates meaning whose message is close to the corresponding fragment in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Back to the meaning of Babette's offering. What is this gesture; is it, similarly as in *Mrs Dalloway*, an offering for its own sake? What is its more precise connotation? Wiesław Juszczak, who perceives one of the meanings of *Mrs Dalloway* as a *parabole* of the artist and the dinner scene as a description of the creative act, thus ends his argument on the sacrifice made by Clarissa Dalloway: *The word "offering" assumes suitable rank only when we treat the dinner as burnt offering and perceive in it the victim of the offering in greater detail. That, which Clarissa placed into a gesture that someone might take to be a symptom of snobbery, while another will regard it as senseless effort, a superfluous and unnecessary cause of excitement (...) is everything that she possesses and can bestow, something that she can cast onto the pyre together with herself.*²² The force of the sacrificial gesture is capable of altering reality for a single moment, of achieving that, which could not be accomplished through religion, "with the aid" of the religious meetings held by the congregation. Babette's artistry became the reason why those who had been hostile drew closer and turned into members of a single community.

The feast turns from one minute to the next into an extraordinary experience, a fact of which its participants become slowly aware. It assumes the force of a rite. The up to then ordinary time of consumption now becomes denser and changes into the time of a festivity. Suddenly, the space of the humble home of the two sisters turns into "an entirely different" space; while remaining the same it already was no longer identical. The space enclosed within the walls of the dining room becomes real, truly existent, and "powerful". The feast began with disagreements, accusations and mutual suspicion, but with time tension becomes alleviated and finally is replaced by the mystery of forgiveness and conciliation. The community is re-established.

In *To the Lighthouse* Mrs Ramsay invited to dinner friends and acquaintances. Just as her twin, Mrs Dalloway, she fears whether the dinner would turn out to be a success: *The room (she looked round it) was very shabby. (...) They all sat separate.*²³ When it became obvious that it would be impossible to link those monad-

ic beings into a whole the whole situation undergoes a sudden and radical transformation: *Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed, as they had not been in the twilight, into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass, which, far from giving any accurate view of the outside world, rippled it so strangely that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things waned and vanished, waterily.*

*Some change at once went through them all, as if this had really happened, and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there.*²⁴

The culmination of the film feast is a speech given by the general. As a young man he once participated in meetings held by the community, which he had abandoned many years ago. Nevertheless, he remembered the teachings of the pastor and commenced his speech by citing the latter's words: *Mercy and truth have met together. Righteousness and bliss shall kiss one another. Man, in his weakness and shortsightedness believes he must make choices in this life. He trembles at the risks he takes. We do know fear. But no. Our choice is of no importance. There comes a time when our eyes are opened and we come to realize that mercy is infinite. We need only await it with confidence and receive it with gratitude. Mercy imposes no conditions. And lo! Everything we have chosen has been granted to us. And everything we rejected has also been granted. Yes, we even get back what we rejected.* The choice which the general (then a colonel) made decades ago while deciding to opt for a military career is a reversal of the decision made by Philippa who resigned from the career of a famous singer and rejected the offer of marriage made by Achille Papin. Her gesture of renunciation and devotion to serving the community is a sacrifice of finite happiness in the name of infinite values. The general's career, a temporal fulfilment, produced at the end of his life reflections on the insignificance of his successes.

Once the feast ends, the general, already leaving, turns to Martina, once his love: *I have been with you every day of my life. Tell me you know that. – Yes, I know it. – You must also know that I shall be with you every day that is granted to me from now on. Every evening I shall sit down to dine with you. Not with my body, which is of no importance, but with my soul. Because this evening I have learned, my dear, that in this beautiful world of ours, all things are possible.* This text is a reversal of the words uttered years ago, while departing from the pastor's home: *I shall never, never see you again! I have learned here that life is hard and cruel and that in this world there are things that are impossible.*

A strange and unusual evening, a time suffused with paradoxes. A time when those who did not understand now started to do so. When the impossible becomes pos-

sible. When those who sing: *Your kindness is second to none, you keep us clothed and fed* now in contemplative musing find delight in the pleasures of dining. When a community arises from a sect torn apart and composed of isolated beings. What is this reality, that comes as such a surprise to all the dining companions? Refrain a while from replying and once again reach for a fragment from Virginia Woolf's book and the moment of illumination experienced by Mrs Ramsay: *Everything seemed possible. Everything seemed right. Just now she had reached security (...) Nothing need be said; nothing could be said. There it was, all round them. It partook, she felt, carefully helping Mr. Bankes to a specially tender piece, of eternity; as she had already felt about something different once before that afternoon; there is a coherence in things, a stability; something, she meant, is immune from change, and shines out (...) in the face of the flowing, the fleeting, the spectral, like a ruby.*²⁵

Mrs Ramsay's experience but also that of the participants of the feast given by Babette is best evoked by a poignant oxymoron borrowed from Czesław Miłosz: *the eternal moment*.²⁶ But we still do not know what this is all about. Recall, therefore, the precisely accentuated motifs: the feeling of peace, order, harmony, unity and fulfilment, the linking of opposites and, finally, the abundance of food and beverages. All these components allow us to declare that for single moment the gates of heaven opened for the participants of this magical evening.

The dining companions gather outside the house. They hold hands and dance under the starry sky around a well (a fount of life?), not quite conscious of the fact that the prayer so often said by them – *Your kingdom come* – has just come true. Quite possibly, only the words of the young Kant from his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* match this moment of happiness, fulfilment, and contentment: *In the universal stillness of nature and the tranquility of the mind, the immortal soul's hidden capacity to know speaks an unnamable language and provides inchoate ideas which are certainly felt but are incapable of being described.*²⁷

Endnotes

¹ All cited fragments from *Babette's Feast* come from: *Anecdotes of Destiny*, Random House, New York 1958.

² I received this information from Zbigniew Basara. The fact that these are not exceptions is testified by the strikingly superficial and naïve fragment on *Babette's Feast* from an article by Philippe Niel, *Obrazy ucztowania na ekranach. Ze światowego repertuaru roku 1988*, "Kino" no. 11, 1989, pp. 40-41.

³ Cf. A. Brillat-Savarin, *Fizjologia smaku albo Medytacja o gastronomii doskonałej*, Warszawa 1977.

⁴ J. Brach-Czajna, *Metafizyka mięsa*, "Twórczość" no. 10, 1986, pp. 81-91.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86, 85.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷ I. Bergström, *Dutch Still-Life Painting in the Seventeenth Century*, London 1956.

⁸ M. Rzepińska, *Siedem wieków malarstwa europejskiego*, Wrocław 1979, p. 257; N. Schneider, *The Art of the Still Life. Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period*, Köln 1990, pp. 76-87.

⁹ E. Panofsky, *Rzeczywistość i symbol w malarstwie niderlandzkim XV wieku. iSpiritualia sub metaphoris corporaliū*, (in:) idem, *Studia z historii sztuki*, Warszawa 1971, pp. 122-150.

¹⁰ I. Bergström, *Disguised Symbolism in "Madonna" Pictures and Still Life*, iThe Burlington Magazine", vol. XCVII, 1955, no. 631 (part I), p. 307.

¹¹ J. Pollakówna, *Rozważania o trzech obrazach*, "Więź" no. 23, 1984, p. 71.

¹² Ch. Sterling, *Le nature morte de l'antiquité a nos jours*, Paris 1952, p. 62. On paintings by Cotán see: M. Rzepińska, op. cit., pp. 295-296; Schneider, op. cit., pp. 122-124; J. Wiercińska, *Hiszpańscy malarze martwych natur I połowy XVII wieku. Wystawa w Kimbell Art Museum w Forth Worth*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki", LI, no. 3-4, 1989, pp. 308-310.

¹³ When we say that someone is "speechless" we do not mean that they have nothing to say. On the contrary, such speechlessness is really a kind of speech. In German the word stumm (mute) is connected with the word stammeln (to stutter or stammer). Surely the distress of the stutterer does not lie in the fact that he has nothing to say. Rather, he wants to say too much at once and is unable to find the words to express the pressing wealth of things he has on his mind. Similarly, when we are at loss for words in this way, what we want to say is actually brought especially close to us as something for which we have to seek new words. H-G. Gadamer, *O zamknięciu obrazu*, in: *Estetyka w świecie*, selected texts ed. M. Gołaszewska, Kraków 1986, vol. 2, p. 55.

¹⁴ C.G. Jung, *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane*, Warszawa 1981, p. 391.

¹⁵ P. Florenski, *Ikostas i inne szkice*, Warszawa 1981, p. 82.

¹⁶ On imposed attempts at interpreting one of Cotán's paintings in the spirit of conventional symbolic see: M. Rzepińska, op. cit., p. 296.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Język, tekst, interpretacja. Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 139-147.

¹⁸ See: R. Marszałek, *Kamień w wodę*, Warszawa 1980, p. 124.

¹⁹ G. van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 399-400.

²⁰ V. Woolf, *Pani Dalloway*, transl. K. Tarnowska, Warszawa 1961, p. 143.

²¹ I discovered the *oeuvre* of Virginia Woolf thanks to an excellent book by Wiesław Juszcak: *Zasłona w rajskie ptaki albo o granicach „okresu powieści”*, Warszawa 1981.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

²³ V. Woolf, *Do latarni morskiej*, Warszawa 1962, transl. K. Klinger, pp. 124-125.

²⁴ In the Polish version of this study I cite the philological translation by Ewa Gieysztor in: W. Juszcak, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Do you agree then/To abolish what is, and take from movement the eternal moment...* Cz. Miłosz, *Notatnik: Bon nad Lemanem*, (in:) *Wiersze*, Kraków 1984, vol. I, p. 292.

²⁷ After: B. Hrabal, *Zbyt głośna samotność*. Warszawa 1989, p. 36.

It has always been assumed that the most important things in the Gospels are the ethical maxims and commandments. But for me the most important thing is that Christ speaks in parables taken from life, that He explains the truth in terms of everyday reality. The idea that underlies this is that communion between mortals is immortal, and that the whole of life is symbolic because it is meaningful.

(Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*)

Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

(Matthew 26,13; Mark 14,9; John 12,1-8)

Babette's Feast, the film by Gabriel Axel, is an extraordinary work. Even keeping in mind that it was made in 1987, i.e. a period rather kind to the cinema – the time of, i.a. *Ginger and Fred* (1986), *Intervista* (1987) by Fellini, *The Sacrifice* (1986) by Tarkovsky, and *Wings of Desire* (1987) by Wenders – it will remain for long a verbal challenge for the cinema. Its captivating features include simplicity and an almost anachronic but thus ostentatious modesty and frugality not devoid, however, of intense hues, flavour, and harmony. This is a traditional, “most ordinary” film story with narration immersed in the literary original, a film told also by an off-screen narrator. A film deprived of special effects, a thoroughly Scandinavian (European) uninteresting story, not of this century. A “quiet” film, unwilling to shock but precisely for this reason posing a still open and important challenge for the tide of the “special effects” cinema flooding us today: films full of pretentious kitsch, tawdriness, stupidity, thoughtlessness and cruelty taken straight out of police files and with sensitivity often inversely proportionate to the ever expanding muscles of *Terminator* no. 10. This is a cinema either infantile or highly sophisticated and devised in the studios of aesthetes, swollen in the manner of the belly of an architect of new avant-garde imagination, a cinema whose emptiness peers through the masks of facial expressions and overly fashionable postmodern grimaces. The author of this small-scale and “unattractive” film story represents imposing courage: *Babette's Feast is an adaptation of a story by Karen Blixen, a tiny pearl on the margin of the main current of her oeuvre. (...) I have been dreaming about this film for over 14 years, the screenplay was rejected almost everywhere, and producers and distributors doubted whether it is possible to make a film upon the basis of story which as nothing in common with farewell to Sforza. It was impossible to transmit the whole subtlety of the story's language, and thus it became necessary to ostensibly betray Karen Blixen so as to remain loyal to her.*¹ Despite the last sequence of this statement, Axel's film, regardless of an insignificant reduction of the text, is a masterpiece faithfully transposing not only ambience

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Mary and Martha (Remarks on *Babette's Feast*)

but also the basic content of the story. What does its challenge consist of? It would be simplest to express it in the words uttered by the protagonist at the end of the film: *...Throughout the world sounds one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me the chance to do my very best.*

I recall the version heard on screen. Its expansion and supplement are to be found in the novel by Karen Blixen, recently translated into Polish by Wiesław Juszczak: *... (Papin said:) It is terrible and unbearable to an artist to be encouraged to do, to be applauded for doing, his second best (...). Throughout the world sounds one long cry from the heart of the artist: Give me the chance to do my very best.*

*

Among all the extraordinary aspects of *Babette's Feast* and the unusual aura surrounding the film mention is due to a fact that could give rise to equal astonishment: the film won the 1988 Oscar award of the American Film Academy (allowing us to treat this institution with a great dose of respect). Its message has been heard. This simple motion picture, suffused with dense meaning, can be interpreted and deciphered in a variety of ways. It can be perceived within a cinematic context and in reference to assorted problems of adapting great Danish literature for the screen, a distant allusion of sorts to *Hunger* by Knut Hamsun (a voice from afar tackling that great theme broached by the Danes – as the American press put it). The *Feast's* theme can be used as a prism for perceiving a gentle albeit beautiful and powerful response to *La grande bouffe*. A revival and restoration of meaning, a return of the sacrum to be confronted with the violent manifestations and desecralisation of *The Last Supper* in Bunuel's *Viridiana* (*A certain man made a great supper and invited many, Luke 14,16*).

The cultural-culinary aspect of *Babette's Feast* has, however, concealed other dimensions of the film. In 1988 Richard Schickel wrote: *From soup to cognac Babette's Feast is delicious, a meal memory will forever savor.* The enthusiasm produced by the film, its success and the

Oscar were accompanied by a gastronomic aura. The readers of "Time" could learn about a special offer proposed by the celebrated Ritz-Carlton Hotel serving Babette's dinner at which one could *expect to pay 75 dollars without the wines*. The film was also regarded (especially by Danish critics) as a continuation and reference to the (theatrical and film) tradition of popular Danish drama (Volkskomedie),² with the director describing it as a fairy tale: *In this remote spot there once lived two sisters*.

I believe that the most characteristic feature of the film version of *Babette's Feast* is the fact that its structure and ambience bring to mind the evangelical parable by Boris Pasternak cited at the beginning of this text. *But for me the most important thing is that Christ speaks in parables taken from life, that He explains the truth in terms of everyday reality*. Before we ask what sort of truth (or rather: what sort of truths, because as in every evangelical parable there are many) it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the search for similarities and the comparison of the film to an evangelical parable do not seem to be some sort of abuse. Both components: "evangelical" and "parable" are deeply enconced in the work in question. In *Babette's Feast* we may discover all strata of meaning together with the oldest, original ones contained in the word: Gospel, defined in Biblical dictionaries as derived from the Greek *eu-aggelion* (*eu*: "well" and *aggello*: "announce"); the Hebrew *besora* means predominantly news about a victory (2 Samuel 18,20-22). The term assumed a religious meaning in sixth-fifth century BC, mainly in reference to Deutero-Isaiah. In the New Testament it appears only in the Gospel of St. Mark and in the writings of St. Paul; St. Matthew used it solely in connection with "kingdom" (Matthew 26,13). The verb *eu-angelizomai* – "to bring glad tidings" – is not to be found in St. Mark and St. Matthew although it is rather frequent in the Gospel according to St. Luke and in St. Paul.³

We could ask therefore: what is the good news told by *Babette's Feast*? Whose victory does it describe? What sort of tidings/kingdom does it announce? ... Could this be a story, tidings, about the victory won by Babette-the artist? The victory of her work? The victory of a work of art? Of art as such? Are these glad tidings (with stress on "glad") about the kingdom of Art?

I must admit that the more I think about *Babette's Feast* and each time I see the film the less I seem to understand it, and that upon each occasion there recurs an occasionally intensified impression of the anxiety with which I watched it the first time. This is an extremely unsettling film. Ostensibly, I am familiar with the story, its contents and happy end. Every time, however, there emerge new and heretofore unknown dimensions and apprehension accompanied by even greater admiration for the film. The more I do not understand it, although I know it so well, the more I would like to see it again. Apparently, nothing could be simpler than to grasp the meaning of *Babette's Feast*. Meanwhile, I experience

increasingly great difficulties with answering the question: what is *Babette's Feast* about? If we were to assume that this is a story about Babette-the artist and a parable about the Victory of an Artist then there instantly comes to mind the question: what sort of a victory? What is its sense? ... A victory won somewhere along the peripheries of the "Great World" and in the presence of more than ten inhabitants of a fishermen's village, a small group of religious Puritan-Protestant fanatics, *pious melancholics who can't even afford salt for their porridge* (gratitude is expressed by a single farmhand and the desultory thanks of the two sisters: *Oh, that was indeed a very good dinner. They all thought it was a very good dinner*). Were the words: *But that is not the end, Babette, I'm certain of that. In Paradise, you will be the great artist that God meant you to be* or the sentiment expressed by one of the tearful sisters: *Ah, how you will delight the angels!* addressed to a victor? (Was the sister not crying over herself? After all, this is a woman who resigned from the career of a singer, rejected the opportunity of becoming an artist and, in evangelical terms, buried her talent).

What is *Babette's Feast* about? Is it about Babette-the artist? Or rather Babette-the servant? Whose victory does it describe? The pious congregation's? The pastor's? The servant's? The artist's? That of the spinster sisters who resigned from love: Martina, abandoned by General Loewenhielm? Philippa, the *soprano of the snows* who never appeared at the Paris Opera and contrary to the predictions made by a great Parisian singer, her master and teacher, *never will have Paris at her feet* and was never heard by *the emperor, the empress nor the grand ladies and beaux spirits of Paris*? Or is it about the victory of General Loewenhielm, who decided: *From now I shall look forward, not backward. I will think of nothing but my career, and some day... I will cut a brilliant figure in the world of prestige*? Was a victory enjoyed by Achille Papin, a great singer and Philippa's teacher?... Who is the winner and who is the loser? Or perhaps this is also a film about resignation? What is *Babette's Feast* about? ... The less I understand the film the more I find it enchanting, and despite the anxiety which it carries, watching it is always a source of pleasure. Here, we find a second component of the Evangelical "parable". Several terms define this literary genre, which applies comparisons and a certain aura of secrecy. The Greek nouns *parabole* (*para* and *balio*: "to place side by side, parallel") and *paroimia* correspond to the Hebrew *mashal* and the more general *hida*. The latter two denote not solely an expanded comparison but also a puzzle, a comparison-allegory whose purpose is not only to illustrate but also to inspire a search for a certain meaning. Synopticians use the term "parable" to describe a sentence or a proverb, but as a rule the comparison is enlarged to the size of a longer tale, pleasing the listeners. Such is the nature of the parables of the Kingdom of God, the vineyard tenants who com-

mitted murder, the wedding feast, Satan casting out Satan, the speck and beam in the eye, the rich man, the faithful servant, the barren fig tree, the invitation to the wedding feast, the lost sheep, the unjust judge and the widow, the Pharisee and the tax collector, and of the talents. Ejected from the context, particular elements of such parables lose all meaning.⁴

It must be added, Henri Daniel Rops wrote, that the Semitic intellect is distant from the manner of thought derived from the Greeks and never demanded logical exactness or the sort of didactic precision that we require. Regardless of the way in which such parables are classified they remain magnificent pieces of literature. Renan was correct when he sought in them something akin to a Greek sculpture in which the ideal may be touched and loved. We come across parables throughout the whole Gospel to the last days in the life of Jesus, and some, such as the parables of the sower, the wheat and the chaff, the wise and foolish virgins, the prodigal son or the good Samaritan, have become so deeply enrooted that they have turned into an indispensable part of the very essence of our culture and thought. All share the same characteristic traits: simplicity of expression, vigorous realism, and genuine poetry, the sort that flows directly from the heart.⁵

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What does the story about Babette tell us? What is *Babette's Feast* about? *In this remote spot there once lived two sisters*. Is it, therefore, a story about two sisters? Or, more exactly, about two sisters and a servant? Or perhaps about a feast prepared by a servant? *Babette's Feast* is suffused with the Bible.

Among the list of Biblical references and citations (discussed by Wiesław Juszczyk – cf. the article in this book) the most essential for the structure of the film plot and the ambience of Karen Blixen's novel is, in my opinion, the evangelical motif of Mary and Martha. (In the story it appears clearly and literally, with Babette described as *dark Martha in the house of two fair Marys*). The remaining motifs of *Babette's Feast* concentrate around this particular one and the memorable scene depicting the visit paid by Jesus, welcomed at the home of Mary and Martha and described only in the Gospel according to St. Luke.

*

In *Babette's Feast* we can encounter the old, nay, eternal dispute between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*.

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me". But the Lord an-

swered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her (Luke 10, 38-42).

If this motif of controversy involving *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, as the scene has been interpreted already at the very onset of the Church and in its tradition (Martha may be correctly regarded as the symbol of practical life, and Mary as that of contemplative life⁶), can be recognised as the central motif of *Babette's Feast* then I would be inclined to say more. Namely, that the story told by Karen Blixen and Axel comprises a great dispute about Martha, her huge defence, and a *sui generis* humane compensation and "response given to Martha" years later. It lauds Martha. Within this praise (as well as in the questions and anxieties that it generates) one can easily come across an echo of other queries and declarations, those by another great Danish author who owed sleepless nights to the story of Abraham (*There have existed countless generations that knew by heart, word for word, the story of Abraham; but how many has it rendered sleepless?*). *Babette's Feast* is permeated with the Bible and urges us to conduct the type of exegesis and interpretation devised within the range of Protestant culture, a particular variety of "Protestant meditation", to coin a term, a perception that combines the perspective of "eternity and topicality", a perception from the viewpoint of "the eternal now" (which also does not lose sight of the existential dimension). It impels to embark upon the sort of meditation whose utmost example could be the praise of Abraham proposed by Søren Kierkegaard in his *Fear and Trembling*. The story told by Karen Blixen and Axel – stemming from the spirit of the same Protestant culture – not only comes close to the essence of the Evangelical parable but, at the same time, constitutes pertinent meditation, as in the scene from the Gospel according to Luke.

I can only hope for suitable praise for *Babette's Feast*, but considering that the framework of these remarks and even more so my talent are insufficient for the task in question I take the liberty of merely noting assorted points on which such meditation could concentrate, and seek help in the words from *Fear and Trembling* in the conviction that the story we encounter in *Babette's Feast* is a tale, which... *has the extraordinary quality of always being glorious no matter how poorly it is understood.*

*

The parable about the feast given by Babette (it was Ricoeur who described evangelical parables as extended symbols) contains also the mystery of the symbol of life, mentioned by Lotman while indicating that the symbol appearing in history and culture is given in an unclear and allusive manner, and that its content

only glimmers through expression while the latter indicates the former merely *via* allusion.⁷ The story about Babette's feast is constructed according to this law of the mystery of the symbol. If we were to wish to follow "precisely" the scene and the figures of Mary and Martha as described by St. Luke then we would immediately encounter various obstacles, start losing our way, and succumb to astonishment and paradox. *Babette's Feast* is not some sort of a cliché, a mechanical repetition of a scheme. Here, nothing is "precise", everything seems to be unclear, and accents had been arranged differently and subjected to a shift of sorts (just as important appears to be another specificity of great Danish authors – a sense of irony). Who are Mary and Martha "precisely"? *The two fair Marys* – Martina and Philippa – care for the poor and are devoted to charity. After all, they are representatives of a practical Protestant, "horizontal" Christianity. If they do reveal certain traces of ascesis (resignation from marriage, spinsterhood) then this too is practical, realistic Protestant submission, obedience towards their father, and sacrifice aiming at total immersion in serving mankind and society, i.e. nothing (teas, meetings, and reading the Holy Writ), it would seem, that could have any sort of connection with mysticism and contemplation. What about the servant Martha? "Faithful Martha" – Babette is, after all, an Artist, and in her hands even local fish soup and soaked bread change into a spiritual feast, reflected in the faces of paupers. Do we not encounter in this silent (experienced, suffering) Martha, relegated to the background, constantly absent and, apparently, distant from God (or far from practicing piety and a nominal "papist"), absorbed with the cares and concerns of daily life and running a kitchen, "practical and pragmatic", a greater dose of mysticism and contemplation when we watch her strolling silently across meadows or along the seashore, gazing into the distance and at a passing seagull (*Look at the birds of the air*) just before making the decision about her great resignation and sacrifice. Can it be said that this Martha resembles Mary? Despite all those uncertainties we feel that we remain constantly within the range of the spirit of the scene from the Gospel according to St. Luke, the same mystery of the dispute between Mary and Martha. We feel that just as from that moment Mary and Martha cannot exist apart so Martina, Philippa and Babette exist together and will always do so.

The fate of the other protagonists of *Babette's Feast* may also reveal a reference to the Gospel of St. Luke – that perennial question whether they had chosen *that good, better part*, as in the case of General Lowenhielm, already prior to his admission, the annunciation of grace (*Man, in his weakness and shortsightedness, believes he must make choices in this life. He trembles at the risks he takes. We do know fear. But no. Our choice*

is of no importance) when he prepares for departure for the feast, to the site of his choice, and settles accounts while looking into a mirror – *Vanity. Vanity. All is vanity* – and addresses his younger self from the time of that choice: *Let's see who was right*. We notice this reference also in the doubt-ridden letter written by the artist Achille Papin: *For 35 years, Miss Philippa, I have deplored the fate that kept your voice from filling the Grand Opera House in Paris. When I think of you honored, respected, and surrounded by a warm and happy swarm of children, and when I think of myself – a lonely, graying old man – forgotten by those who once applauded and adored me, I feel it is you who chose the better path in life*. Finally, we observe or can surmise the same question and concealed fear in the faces of Martina and Philippa.

Origen declared in a commentary to the Gospel: *For the mystery of love is lost to the active life unless one directs his teaching, and his exhortation to action, toward contemplation*. Neither praxis nor contemplation can exist without each other. It should be rather said that Martha welcomed the word into her house, i.e. into her soul in a more corporeal way, while Mary listened to it spiritually, by sitting at His feet.⁸

The figures of Martha and Mary have been interpreted in various ways. The above-cited Origen perceived in Martha the tradition of the Synagogue. Mary, who accepted the tidings spiritually and chose the better part, is a representative of pagans. Intuition about the pagan character of Babette's sacrifice-feast in the reflections of Wiesław Juszczak could be justified and supported by theological tradition. Keeping in mind this lack of clarity in the case of Babette, who is partly Mary and partly Martha, and predominantly, an Artist (is the Artist not connected with corporeality, the embodiment, and is he not sometimes a great holy Pagan?) we come closer to the greatest mystery situated already in the evangelical sources, to that famous issue, which Daniel Rops described as almost unresolvable. I have in mind the question: who was the woman mentioned in all four Gospels, about whom it was said: *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her*. The offering made by Babette in her extravagant gesture, the waste of an enormous sum of money for a single feast, bring to mind the sacrifice that provoked the apprehension of the murmuring disciples:

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good

work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always (Matthew 26,6 sqq.).

The news about spending 10 000 franks, the incomprehensible deed committed by Babette, came as a total shock to the practical Martina and Philippa and for a moment produced their great compassion and pity: *Now you'll be poor for the rest of your life*, to which they heard the response: *An artist is never poor*. Perhaps one should say: Mary and Martha share this victory. The film contains the following scene: at the end of the feast the guests go to a second room for coffee, Philippa sits down to the piano, Martina chooses a place next to the general, and the previously contravened members of the congregation whose faces lit up during the evening and whose tongues were loosened, now exchange blessings. The camera leads us over the abandoned "supper" to the kitchen-workshop where Babette, exhausted and holding a wine glass, sits down at the table and takes a sip, deep in thought and as if even more absent. The first chords are heard from afar. She raises her eyes and glances full of comprehension and recognition in the direction from which the piano is heard, transferring us to the room in which Philippa starts singing. This song (and scene) appears to be the summit of the evening (despite the fact that they precede the finale of the whole film). The song is about a day coming to an end, the passage of life, encroaching conclusion. It also beseeches: *Be for us our infinite Light in the valley of night* and: *Admit us to Thy mercy divine* (whilst Babette remains behind firmly shut kitchen doors). The cited words allude to Psalm 23: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil* and in the next verse: *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over*, to the aforementioned sacrifice, startling the disciples. This is an old Protestant hymn with lyrics and music by the German poet Georg Newark: *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten*. I believe that it also comments on the fate of all the characters (concerned with their choice or uncertain about it) and, predominantly, on the fate of Babette, her story, experiences and offering. After all, it foretells her triumph, soon to take place, and seems to be "a response given to Martha" a mere moment before the recognition of the servant not only as a great artist but also as Mary:

*If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that nought can move.
What can these anxious cares avail thee,
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
What can it help, if thou bewail thee
O'er each dark moment as it flies?*

*Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.
Only be still and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure
And all-deserving love hath sent
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.
He knows the time for joy, and truly
Will send it when He sees it meet,
When He has tried and purged thee thoroughly
And finds thee free from all deceit,
He comes to thee all unaware
And makes thee own His loving care.
Nor think amid the heat of trial
That God hath cast thee off unheard,
That he whose hopes meet no denial
Must surely be of God preferred;
Time passes and much change doth bring,
And sets a bound to everything.
All are alike before the Highest.
'Tis easy to our God, we know,
To raise thee up though low thou liest,
To make the rich man poor and low;
True wonders still by Him are wrought
Who setteth up and brings to nought.
Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,
So do thine own part faithfully,
And trust His Word, though undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee!
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.*

Endnotes

- ¹ Statement from an interview given by Daniele Parra in: "La Revue du Cinema", no. 437/88, cited after: material ed. Manana Chyb in "Filmowy Serwis Prasowy".
- ² In Denmark the film was received less enthusiastically. The reception was rather chilly and critics concentrated on the faithfulness of the screen adaptation, perceived as a blow against the status and sacredness of the *oeuvre* of Karen Blixen; emphasis was also placed on the dangers of cinematic trivialisation. Cf. Anne Jerslev, *Hvad laver Babette i Vestjylland? Babettes Gaestebud – en filmatisering mellem and og kod, billeder og banaliseringer*, "Satiden" no. 4/1991, pp. 63-71.
- ³ Xavier Leon-Dufour SJ, *Słownik Nowego Testamentu*, transl. and prep. Rev. Kazimierz Romaniuk, Poznań 1981, p. 254.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 532.
- ⁵ Henri Daniel Rops, *Dzieje Chrystusa*, transl. Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa, Warszawa 1972, p. 241.
- ⁶ Origen, *Homilie o Ewangelii św. Łukasza*, phrase 72, in: *Pisma Starożytności pisarzy*, vol. XXXVI, transl. and prep. Stanisław Kalinkowski, introduction Rev. Marek Starowieyski, Warszawa 1986, p. 168.
- ⁷ Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 151-154.
- ⁸ Origen, op. cit., p. 168.

The Sin of Gluttony and the Cultural Conflict. On the Margin of *Babette's Feast*

1. *De re coquinaria* by Apicius (first century A.D.) was probably the first to verbalise the view that the way of taking nourishment is a refined “culinary art” – a skill that belongs to the domain of art (*ars techné*), and thus entails doing something according to a set of rules. Close to Aristotelian “productive knowledge”, *ars victuaria* in the twelfth-century classification by Radulf da Campo Lungo, known as el Ardiente, and by Hugo of St. Victor was one of the seven mechanical arts. Although later it was excluded from classifications aimed at formulating a definition of art exclusively as an ability to produce beauty (the seven fine arts according to Batteax in the mid-eighteenth century), thanks to idealistic aesthetics “culinary art” could find its place either among skills still comprehended according to the classical and only slightly redefined distinction (art conceived as professional knowledge, such as tailoring, medicine, trade, and “defensive capability”), or – as Libelt interpreted it in a slightly convoluted manner – among the so-called social sciences showing Platonic ideals of truth, beauty and goodness in life, all enhancing the latter. Such maximalist speculations constituted the whole sphere of material culture, of which it was demanded that it should satisfy purely practical needs on par with “superior” requirements, so that the useful would be simultaneously pleasant, as Aristotle desired. This shifts the whole issue to an equal degree towards psychological aesthetics (especially its Cartesian hedonistic version, rendered dynamic by basically anti-intellectual twentieth-century speculations on the theory of satiation) as well as towards the history of culture and cultural anthropology. Culinary art, together with the accompanying ritual of recipes, cookbooks, hierarchy of interiors, furniture, table setting, servants, etc., is one of the key moments in manners and morals (lifestyle) embedded in social hierarchies. Today, it may be viewed in yet another, new way toppling the old, segmentary findings, which separated the inherent from that, which is gained through culture: we know that manners and morals – social experience – cultural (milieu) conventions shape our personality thanks to their durability/rootedness

and become part of the genetic code. Cultural habits are our “second nature”, making itself known in the most varied situations.¹

2. *Babette's Feast*: a refugee fleeing France in the throes of revolutionary terror arrives in a small Danish settlement. The kindly albeit distant Danish women who offered her shelter entrust her with keeping their home and introduce her to the arcana of local culinary art – simple or even primitive, frugal recipes based on a few basic ingredients (the famous recipe for rye bread soup, *nota bene* used up to this day in traditional Scandinavian cooking). Babette, slightly mysterious, with an obscure past, adapts herself to the new environment but when she unexpectedly wins in the lottery she spends all the money on a curious caprice – a sophisticated banquet for her Danish hosts. The meal becomes a demonstration of her culinary mastery as the former chef of a famous Parisian restaurant as well as a manifestation of the refined and always slightly libertine French culture of dining.

This simple plot told in the unhurried rhythm of consecutive sequences of preparations for the feast – whose detailed presentation at a certain moment outright balances on the edge of a television cooking show – should be analysed as an out-and-out textbook exercise in cultural anthropology. We are dealing with a typical confrontation of two different lifestyles – dissimilar sets of daily/routine behaviour within the range of European culture in which the table (the culture of dining) is, according to Norbert Elias, a fundamental element of Western civilisation and testimony of certain domains of cultural competence (lifestyle/manner of living).² Obviously, “table manners” (to paraphrase the title of a textbook by Erasmus of Rotterdam, basic for modern Western civilisation) is simultaneously an expression of a certain existential thesis and, consequently, as a behavioural category it is an element of social stratification and a factor shaping distinctive behaviour. This makes it possible to treat the story described in *Babette's Feast* as part of the socio-ethnological *orbis interior-orbis exterior* thesis and an illustration of a cultural confrontation initiated by the appearance of the “stranger”. In this case, we are concerned with a confrontation of two antithetical European cultures: the closed, severe “town” culture and the open, refined and cosmopolitan “court” culture, created and “civilised” by modern France, whose social symbol became French cuisine. French cooks (M.A. Careme), aristocrats and statesmen (e.g. cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin or Marquis Louis de Béchamel), succeeded in granting modern culinary art created during the sixteenth century by the Italians a heretofore unknown sophistication and diversification, propagated subsequently by such works as the famous *La Physiologie du Goût* by A. Brillat-Savarin (1825).

From this viewpoint, the story told in *Babette's Feast* assumes the features of a veritable “credo” by referring



– presumably – to the very essence of Kantian poetic involving the middle class (the bourgeoisie) and the higher court class. As a consequence, it evokes a dispute between two moral stands: Protestant (in the extreme version represented by the pietists) and Catholic, together with their dual comprehension of civilisation either as closed and internal morality (Protestantism) or its external counterpart (Catholicism).

All these factors require that we regard *Babette's Feast* as a morality play exploiting the immanent feature of the culture of dining, namely, that as a quintessence of a certain philosophy of life this particular culture is determined by its characteristic ethical premises. In accordance with the steadfast rules of a philosophical-didactic tale we witness a battle waged for human souls, in which the protagonists face the necessity of making a choice between basic categories and concepts that they appear to allegorically personify: between Virtue and Sin (here: Gluttony), Pride and Faith, Truth and Falsehood. The situation of the choice balances on the very edge of a cultural/world outlook conflict in its entire dimension. The decision to participate, or not, in the feast is tantamount to choosing one of two choices evaluated, however, from the Protestant point of view: to opt for tradition (stability, durability, truth) or change (revolution and motion and hence also falsehood and illusion).

Despite the referent danger of disturbing the balance, the very fact of sitting down to a table proves decisive for the ultimate rejection of a conflict for the sake of participation and opening up towards the “stranger”. An examination of this process of attaining acceptance may be explained by the mechanisms of the mutual impact of cultures; we know that such impact is provoked more by differences than similarities for two reasons: either because the “strange” idea becomes part of familiar conceptions and ideas (“a search for one’s own”) or, on the contrary, because it is unfamiliar and thus gives

rise to curiosity (“the quest for the strange”). It is the “stranger” who introduces into the inner cultural structures that, which comes “from the outside” and causes the impulse of cultural change.

The course of Babette’s feast, with its growing dramaturgy of gradually overcoming distance and conventions, turns almost into a rite of mutual gift giving in the manner of the potlatch, a key moment of activating two authentic European cultures “towards integration”. The first bite of sophisticated French hors d’oeuvre produces an integration of different traditions; in this case, the gesture has an outright oecumenical dimension, so distant from the destructive leftist vision of the self-annihilating consumer society shown in *La grande bouffe*. Quite possibly, this could be also a poetical gesture if we were to consider the problem from the viewpoint of the still utopian vision of a united Europe (and, more widely, a united world, in the once again activated illusion of “internationalism”). At this point it seems worth recalling the end scenes of *Babette's Feast*: after the magnificent dinner everything becomes the same as before. The level of understanding and acceptance did not cross the limits delineated by, for example, dinner in an exotic restaurant – a mere pleasant, festive episode in the routine of daily life or a tourist programme. New experiences outlined even more strongly the spheres of “one’s own-ness” (“smaller homeland”), established by tradition and prejudice, in order to protect them against a successive utopia.

Endnotes

- ¹ These problems were presented in detail by Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, *Natura, nauka, sztuka – nowy paradygmat*, in: *Sztuka a natura. Materiały XXXVI I Sesji Naukowej Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki przeprowadzonej 23-25 listopada 1989 roku w Katowicach*, Katowice 1991, pp. 15-29, especially p. 17.
- ² Norbert Elias, *Przemiany obyczajów w cywilizacji Zachodu*, Warszawa 1980.

In Front of the Room (Stalker)

All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression – wrote Novalis.¹ True, it appears that there exist several, perhaps more than ten themes, which from antiquity give man no peace and incessantly return in the form of countless tales and successive transformations. They resemble fruit maturing each summer, whose flavour is familiar but, nonetheless, desirable. Just like the fruit, none of which can satiate our hunger once and for all, these tales never end nor are they capable of satisfying dreams or ultimately putting our anxieties at ease. Those perennially repeated attempts at formulating fundamental questions appear to be a state as natural for man as eating or sleeping and in a similar manner call for constant repetition.

One of the themes are miracles, dreams about the unattainable – an extremely prominent symbolic figure of “the journey beyond the farthest horizon”.

*

Miracles are, as a rule, considered to be events transgressing the normal laws and potential of Nature, phenomena independent of natural causes and effects. A similar definition is, however, extremely dubious just as our knowledge of the laws of Nature is uncertain and incomplete.² A thus comprehended miracle incessantly awaits to be toppled (“science is still incapable of exploring it, but one day...”) and loses its gravity, thus turning into a mere outlandish trick. At the same time (due to linguistic intuition) we consent without any protest to using the word “miracle” to describe phenomena surrounding us as “enchanted” but not breaking the natural principles ruling the world and explained by science.³

Miracles are just like inspiration, which (as the Fathers of the Church from the Antioch school discovered) must be repeated in reading: *Prophecies are mentioned when someone interprets the words of a prophet*, according to the teachings of Diodore of Tarsus.⁴ It seems worth noting that the Polish word *cud* is related to the verb: *czuć, odczuwać* (to feel, cf. the Slavonic *udo*) and thus also to: *czuwać, być czujnym* (to be watchful).⁵ *Dziw, dziwo* (*divŮ*) denotes something which we all *podziwiamy* (ad-

mire) and *przyglądamy* (observe, *divati*). The same holds true for the Latin *miraculum*, derived from the verb: *miror* (which, in turn, originates from the Hebrew: *mareh*) – to observe, to wonder, to admire.

Miracles – also evangelical ones: *dunamis* (Latin: *virtutes*), *semeia kai terata* (*signa et prodigia*) – are not compelled to clash with the natural order of the world; they struggle for man’s soul and his spiritual senses – the ability to see and hear (*He who has ears...*). This was the situation on Mt. Tabor: in accordance with the tradition of Eastern Christianity: *Christ did not undergo transfiguration but the eyes of the apostles opened for a moment.*⁶ St. Gregory Palamas (Greek theologian and mystic from the fourteenth century) wrote: *Christ is transfigured, not by putting on some quality He did not possess previously, nor by changing into something He never was before, but by revealing to His disciples what He truly was, in the opening of their eyes and in giving sight to those who were blind.*⁷ Elsewhere, the saint declared: *This light is not sensual; the apostles were deemed worthy of seeing it with their eyes ... thanks to a special power, but not the one that comes from the senses.* This vision – Palamas cited St. Maximus the Confessor – is realised through the transformation of the impact of their senses.⁸

Naturally, not always did the effects of the miracles according to the Gospel performed by Christ call for such unusual sensitivity of the senses (after all, everyone, and not only the chosen, could admire the regained vigour of a person who only a moment ago was blind, crippled or dying). Nonetheless, as a rule, the miraculous event requires specific inner disposition, i.e. “faith” described in the story of the centurion from Capernaum. Like many others, the centurion asked Christ to heal a loyal servant dear to him. In contrast to them, however, he did not demand the Healer to come to his home: *Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (...) And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was cured* (see: Matthew 8, 5-13).

A *sui generis* negative of the miracle experienced by the centurion is the story recalled upon a number of occasions by the protagonists of Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*.⁹ Although in no scene is the story amassed into an entity and we watch only its shreds and fragments it indubitably constitutes a profound backdrop of the film. This is the way the director described it: *...When the characters in the film set out on their journey into the Zone, their destination is a certain room in which, we are told, everybody’s most secret wish will be granted. And while the Writer and the Scientist, led by Stalker, are making their hazardous way over the strange expanse of the Zone, their guide tells them at one point either a true story, or a legend, about another Stalker, nicknamed Diko-obraz. He had gone to the secret place to ask for his brother who had been killed through his fault, to be brought back to life. When Diko-obraz returned home, however, he discovered that he had become fabulously wealthy.*

The Zone had granted what was in reality his most heartfelt desire, and not the wish that he had wanted to imagine was most precious to him. And Diko-obraz had hanged himself.¹⁰

A miracle thus took place. One could say: *So be it done...* – but not in the way Porcupine wanted (or rather thought he wanted) although – *...as thou hast believed*, even against his will. It is precisely faith, that particular “sense”, that is characteristic for the space of the Room.

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What is the Zone, the unusual space of the journey depicted in the film, a journey “beyond the horizon”? It cannot be described in the same categories as the rest of the world, and it is undeniably unusualness that is its essential feature. From the viewpoint of the rest of the world the Zone exists exclusively in negative categories, as a “lack”, an undifferentiated chasm devoid of characteristic properties. Stalker describes the Zone: *It is so quiet out here, it is the quietest place in the world*, or elsewhere: *There’s no one in the Zone and there can’t be*. It belongs to the category of impossible phenomena (*In the Zone, the longer way, the less risk*), but this “impossibility” cannot be understood as banal improbability typical for the majority of science fiction works (Tarkovsky frequently explained that in *Stalker* only the initial anecdote, the pretext of the story, is science fiction).

Impossibility, negativity becomes (as in apophatic theology) a special concept and category evoking that, which in the world is unutterable and cannot be easily enclosed in categories and conceits. It is a condition for abandoning literalness (or habit) while depicting the world. The tension between the probable and the impossible, that “miraculous” innovation introduced into familiar order, endows the Zone with appropriate sense, rendering it a *sui generis* “metaphor” showing a different vision of that world and disclosing other, not always noticeable dependencies occurring between its elements.¹¹

The miracle, in the manner of a glittering beacon, is a condition for encounter and dialogue; in a certain sense (and in accordance with what Whitman wrote) we notice only that, which becomes (for us?) a miracle.

*

A rather universal conviction, or rather intuition, tells us that apart from that, which can be easily perceived or understood there exists something else, much more important. This reflection has always been an inexhaustible source of spiritual, intellectual and artistic efforts leading, however, towards extremely diverse conclusions. One of the forms of such a dream about transgressing commonplace reality was described with great enthusiasm by Cioran.

Let us cleanse our consciousness of all that surrounds it, all the universes that it trails behind it, and together with it let us purify also perception so that we would become surrounded by whiteness, that oblivion of colours, apart from the single one,

which destroys all others. What tranquillity from the moment when we annul all diversity, when avoiding the Golgotha of nuances we submerge into unity! Consciousness as purified form and subsequently the outright absence of consciousness.

*In order to set ourselves free from the unbearable let us seek another path, an escape, a region where no sensual impression pines for a name or embodiment, let us discover anew original rest, let us abandon hideous memory and together with it – the past, and, first and foremost, let us ignore consciousness, our eternal foe that destroys and exploits us. By way of contrast, the unconscious is a nourisher that strengthens and allows us to participate in our beginnings, our original integrity, and we once again immerse ourselves in the blessed chaos that precedes individuation.*¹²

This ardent call reflects profound disgust with the concrete of the world and the concrete of oneself, a fear of overpowering feelings, memory, and awareness – embodiment. While expressing the need for abandoning the world Cioran naturally followed the path delineated by the tradition of the Orient but also known in Europe (predominantly thanks to Plato and his legacy); he urged to discover that unique paradise of non-corporeal and dispassionate indifference.

Can we compare this idealised domain of escape to the image of the Zone created by Tarkovsky? The author of *Stalker*, just as critical as Cioran of the contemporary, desecralised world, also shows the Zone as a tempting space of a blessed loss of one’s way (the *Stalker* character says about the rest of the world: *Oh God, for me it’s prison everywhere!*), which compels to renounce familiar paths, to set oneself free from ordinary knowledge and well-tested habits. Is this, however, the freedom from the world desired by Cioran? Freedom from feelings and senses? Here, all similarity, unquestioned at the point of departure, breaks down – the Zone demands from the travellers (including *Stalker*) special tension and creates a state of constant unrest.¹³ Although Tarkovsky remained closer to Christian spirituality he just as readily referred to the tradition of the East.¹⁴

If the Zone was to be merely a region of refuge, a shelter against the world, and free of all experiences then the travellers would not wish to return home. Even if they did want to stay (*Stalker*’s silent dream) they still come back. This recalls the dilemma of the mystics expressed, for example, by William (Guillaume) of Saint-Thierry in the opening paragraph of his treatise *De Contemplando Deo*: *Come, let us climb the mountain of God, the home of the God of Jacob, and He shall teach us His paths. Intentions, efforts, thoughts, predilections and all that is concealed in my interior – come, let us climb the mountain, the place where the Lord sees or is seen. Cares, anxieties, fears, almost slave-like toil - wait here for me with a donkey and this body, until I and the boy, reason together with understanding, go there, pay homage, and then return to you. We shall return rapidly. Love of the truth commands us to leave you, but the truth of love, owing to my brethren, does not permit me to renounce and desert you.*

The closing scene in a bar where the travellers meet Stalker's wife and daughter is suffused with emotion, love and suffering; this is one of the most important scenes and, according to Tarkovsky, full of optimism. The Writer and the Professor see a woman, the director adds, *who suffered so much because of her husband, she gave birth to a sick child through his fault, still loves him with the same limitless generosity she felt for him in the days of her youth. Her love, her devotion – this is exactly the miracle with which one can counter the lack of faith, spiritual emptiness, cynicism – that is, all which the heroes of the film have lived until now.* Elsewhere, Tarkovsky stated: *Human love is this miracle which can defy all the dry theorising about hopelessness of the world* [my emphasis – W. M.].

Cioran expressed an undoubtedly intriguing thought: let us purify also perception so that we would become surrounded by whiteness, that oblivion of colours, apart from the single one, which destroys all others. One of the characteristic features of the Zone is undeniably its unique “whiteness” that has a lot in common with prevailing silence, which not unlike endless variability prevents the temptation to idolise this extraordinary space (I shall return to this theme). But such whiteness is not an oblivion of colours, a destruction of all others (as Cioran saw it). After all, it is the reality of the Zone that makes it possible to apply coloured film tape in contrast to the earlier black-and-white scenes.

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An image – Tarkovsky declared – *is indefinite in meaning.* Just as life carries an endless number of meanings. The Zone is also such an image (or more exactly: the image of such an image). I believe, however, that defining it as “ambiguous” would be slightly misleading, a substitute stemming from intuitional hostility and fear of enclosing a complex meaning within an unambiguous conceptual construction.¹⁵ Just like in the case of the symbol the heart of the matter does not concern only, or not so much, a multiplicity of meanings. A variety of meanings always requires their coordination, since – as Aristotle correctly wrote – not signifying one thing is signifying nothing.

A comparison of even the extremely numerous meanings of a certain image does not render it a symbol (nor does it endow it with the properties of an original metaphor). That what is at stake is quite different – the ability to see and hear, that special sense, which opens ears and eyes to the mystery. The countless number of meanings of a symbol originates not from the fact that they come into being in it (simultaneously or one after another) but from the fact that the symbol exists in the dimension of possibility - memory and anticipation.¹⁶

Motion towards entity stems from absence. This is why one of the metaphors of a thus understood symbol can be also silence. *It is so quiet out here, it is the quietest place in the world,* Stalker says about the Zone. Silence (also a special form of quiet) is something more than a means of ex-

pression: it is rather a word that has just been heard or is anticipated;¹⁷ it is the language of the desert and solitude constituting a condition for an encounter.¹⁸ It is as if a state of readiness – a vigil – making it possible to perceive the emergence of a miracle. Paul Celan offered a similar explanation of the existence of poetry: *the poetic word, in its most evident expressions, appears to be a word rising from silence, transcending that silence, and breaking away from it, but without ceasing to move along its edges.*¹⁹ The Flemish theologian Antoine Vergote wrote: *The revealed meaning can be heard only along the edgings of silence.*²⁰ The Zone is a place of a meeting, involving (“disturbing”) the traveller, a concrete transformed by means of feeling, memory and dream. It depicts a state of existence most important for the world, albeit delicate, suspended between that, which is and that, which could become, and one that (as Andrei Tarkovsky wrote about the metaphor) *falls apart at any attempt of touching it.*

*

Tarkovsky maintained that art (which he identified in a certain sense with poetry) is a form of activity that allows man to express absolute truth. *A poet is someone who can use a single image to send a universal message. A man passes another man by, he looks at him but he cannot see him. Another man will look at the same person and he will smile unexpectedly. The stranger has provoked an explosion of associations in him. It's similar with art. A poet takes a small fragment as a starting point and turns it into a coherent whole. Some consider this process boring. These are people who want to know about everything in minutest detail, like accountants or lawyers. But show a toe sticking out of a hole in a sock to a poet and it is enough to produce an image of the whole world in him* [my emphasis – W.M.].

Tarkovsky's view about the toe sticking out from a sock appears to harmonise with that of another poet:

*To see a World in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*²¹

Both Tarkovsky and Blake sought the universal, though opening towards it is not by any means the *oblivion of colours* postulated by Cioran but the concrete, although transfigured by the light of dazzling “whiteness”; their objective is mystical “unity”, albeit embodied and producing an “explosion of associations” (“colours”) created out of reminiscences and dreams. “The toe”, similarly to the “grain of sand” can become an image of the world thanks to the poetic ability to see, the power of symbolic imagination (Blake's postulate: *To see...*). The Zone or the “Room” (also the one from Emmaus) is a personification of this light, a “symbol of a symbol” (understood as an existential stand). “Freed from the world”, they become a void, a chasm in current reality. On the other hand, they remain “tied” to the world, i.e. perceived with the “sense of faith” they demonstrate its potential dimension.

Almost two centuries prior to William Blake another English poet, George Herbert, also began his poem (*Elixir*) with a call-prayer-plea for the miraculous gift of seeing:

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see (...).

and went on to say:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or it he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.

Can we, therefore, be surprised by Tarkovsky's view: *The Zone is in some sense a result of Stalker's imagination. Our line of reasoning was as follows: it is he who invented that place to bring people there and convince them about the truth of his creation (...) I completely agree with the suggestion that it was Stalker who had created the Zone's world in order to invent some sort of faith, a faith in that world's existence.*

Apparently, the twin scenes in a bar, opening and closing the journey to the Zone, possess an essential connection with this reflection. It is from here that the protagonists set out for their journey and here, at the end, that they suddenly and without any effort find themselves upon their return. They stand around a table just like they did previously, and even (as Seweryn Kuśmierczyk noticed) the amount of beer in their glasses had not changed. Perhaps they actually never went anywhere? Such a solution would be, however, a basically incorrect reduction of their experiences to a psychological level. The heart of the matter is rather granting the journey the expressive features of mystical experience.

This particular ability possessed by Stalker – the skill of seeing, the poetic sense – cannot be rationalised as subjective, excessively abundant fantasy severing all ties with reality. The symbol (e.g. the Zone) is free but not arbitrary. Stalker “kindled” a fire that had been already burning, although in a manner that remained invisible to the Writer and the Professor. His imagination not only devised something (in that case it would have created only idols²²), but was also a way of touching (discovering) the world.

Poetic sense is required not only by the person who writes poems but also by the one who reads them. Not only Stalker building the Zone thanks to the force of his imagination, but also the travellers guided by him face its message; not only the author of the film but also its spectators (Tarkovsky: *Everything that happens here depends on us, not on the Zone*).

If poetry is experiencing the world, a special attitude towards reality then the Zone should be treated as a written poem that cannot be completed. Stalker describes poetry: *The Zone is a very complicated system... of traps, and they're all deadly. I don't know what's going on here in the absence of people, but the moment someone shows up everything comes into motion. Old traps disappear and new ones emerge. Safe spots become impassible. Now your path is easy, now it is hope-*

lessly involved. That's the Zone. It may even seem capricious. But it is what we've made with our condition... But everything that's going on here depends not on the Zone, but on us!

*

Stalker is a religious work. It is about an encounter with the *sacrum* and its powerful and dangerous although also fascinating force. It is a Christian film, full of more or less transparent allusions to the Biblical text²³ and tradition (especially Russian Orthodox). The titular protagonist is, after all, an Orthodox saint, an imitator of Christ – *yurodivy*, God's fool. This is the way he is called in the film by the Writer, while Stalker's wife recalls their youth: *You've probably noticed already that he's not of this world. All our neighborhood laughed at him. He was such a bungler, he looked so pitiful. (...) But then he approached me and said: "Come with me". And I did, and never regretted it. I am convinced that the evangelical model contains not only the formula: "Come with me" but also a circumstance basic in the film composition, i.e. the journey – that of the Master teaching the two disciples travelling with him. Naturally, I have in mind pericopies describing the meeting of Jesus and two disciples, and their joint journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24).*

The event on the road near Jerusalem appears to be just as improbable as the expedition into the recesses of the Zone. Its pretext is the premise that the disciples were incapable of recognizing their Master, whom they had seen upon so many occasions: *But their eyes were holden...* Stalker says about the Writer and the Professor: *They don't believe in anything! They've got the organ with which one believes atrophied for lack of use. (...) Oh God, what people (...) Haven't you seen them? They've got empty eyes [my emphasis – W.M].* Is that the reason why they were unable to enter the Room in which they expected to find a miracle? Perhaps it was not the miracle that was missing but eyes capable of noticing it?

Psychological improbability endows the evangelical story with the dimension of an extremely lucid metaphor: he who does not follow the Master on the way to the Room will not learn the Truth (will not “see” it). Note that both Kleopas and his companion end their journey in the Chamber²⁴ and there, during supper, the Stranger *took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them*. An only there, in that openly sacramental and thus symbolical situation, *their eyes were opened, and they knew him*.

This situation has undoubtedly much in common with the scene of the Lord's Transfiguration. Here too (just as on Mt. Tabor), the Lord appears to the disciples; more precisely, he is recognised thanks to the “transformation of their senses” (Maxim the Confessor), “cured blindness” (Gregory Palamas). That, which in reference to Mt. Tabor is a theological interpretation here has been already included into the text of the Gospel.

In Chauvet's opinion the story about the disciples on their way to Emmaus is based on a fundamental question:

how to become a believer? How to cross from disbelief to belief? Chauvet wrote: *Jerusalem – Emmaus – Jerusalem: this topographically round trip is for us the symbolic support of the turn-around, the "transformation" that gradually takes place in the disciples' hearts during the telling of the story.*

Compare these words with Tarkovsky's commentary: *It is important for me to create something specifically human in this film, something indecomposable which crystalizes within the soul of each of us and determines our value. Because although the heroes suffer an apparent defeat, each of them gains something incredibly important: faith, discovery within themselves of that which is the most important. This most important is within every human being.*

*

Does Stalker also not mention the "most important", the "sense of faith": *You were speaking [he turns to the Writer and the Professor] of the meaning of our life, of the unselfishness of art... Take music, for instance. Less than anything else, it is connected to reality, or if connected at all, it's done mechanically, not by way of ideas, just by a sheer sound, devoid of ... any associations. And yet, music, as if by some miracle, gets through to our heart. What is it that resonates in us in response to noise brought to harmony, making it the source of the greatest delight!*²⁵

A similarly comprehended "impartiality" of poetry – one could say: its musical qualities ("an empty sound without association") – was considered by Ricoeur: *It is in this sense that poetry is liberated from the world. But if it is liberated in this sense, in another sense it is bound, and it is bound precisely to the extent that it is also liberated.*²⁶ The void, "liberation from the world", create space for that, which cannot be reduced to a series of empiric gestures and attributes, which transgresses topicality and becomes the dimension of possibility (*posse*).²⁷ It awakens that inner sense, which on Mt. Tabor and in Emmaus allowed the disciples to see the Master. A sense that makes it possible to notice the wonderful reality of that, which ostensibly does not exist, like the world in the mystical apple described by D.H. Lawrence in *Mystic*:

So an apple becomes mystic when I taste in it the summer and the snows, the wild welter of earth and the insistence of the sun.

All of which things I can surely taste in a good apple...

This extraordinary ability to savour the "miracle" is a miracle in itself, although not everyone believes in such miracles:

If I say I taste these things in an apple, I am called mystic, which means a liar.

The controversy concerns the criteria of reality:

The only way to eat an apple is to hog it down like a pig and taste nothing that is real.

The miracle in Emmaus did not last long; to be precise, it did not "last" at all: Christ (recognised by His disciples thanks to sacramental and symbolic gestures, as if in a "clearance") disappeared at the very same moment (*And their eyes were opened and they knew Him. And He vanished out of their sight – Luke 24, 31*). Just as "unreal" is the flavour of the summer and snow in Lawrence's apple.²⁸

What does this disappearance signify? The impossibility of endurance in that brief moment of joy, the impossibility of rendering it inedible, almost recalls expulsion from paradise. Can it be really regarded as the defeat of the disciples? Such defeat is just as ostensible as the one experienced by Tarkovsky's protagonists. This was rather that moment, which Kierkegaard described as an atom not of time but of eternity. St. Luke seemed to suggest that the eyes of the disciples *open on an emptiness – "he vanished from their sight" – but an emptiness full of a presence.*²⁹ Less makes it possible to achieve more.

Christ – "transfigured" on Mt. Tabor and "vanishing" in Emmaus – defends Himself against being enclosed in an idolatric formula of identity, against undertakings reducing His endless transfiguration into the historical Christ.³⁰ By way of example, He protests when Peter, John and James (in the manner of the Israelites creating the golden calf under Mt. Sinai) wish to erect tents on top of the mountain – signs of an established cult commemorating a moment. Christ compels everyone to make an ethical choice – either we treat Him as an idol, comprising a *fait accompli*, or we perceive in Him a challenge to carry out our transfiguration.

The disappearance of Christ in Emmaus resembles His departure from the world. After all, He instructed his disciples:

It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin ... because they believe not in me

(John 16, 7-11). Due to His very essence (if one may use that term), i.e. permanent transfiguration, the Paraclete cannot be enclosed in a hermetic idolatric cult.

How are we, therefore, to interpret the fact that the Writer and the Professor hesitate to cross the threshold of the Room?³¹ It seems that the two *dramatis personae* – who represent different human "types" and who were inclined to set out by different motives – jointly portray the tragedy of disappointment and doubt in the idolatric finity of the world.

If the Writer and the Professor wish to regain that, which they renounced while setting off to the Zone then they contain the sort of *despair* and *infinite resignation* that Kierkegaard described as *the last stage before faith*.³² In the Zone they renounce the certainty brought from the outside and start to open up to *emptiness full of a presence*. It is precisely their failure (and even the idea of destroying the

Room), which testifies that during their transformation they avoided the trap of idolatric enclosure – the one into which Porcupine fell earlier. They resigned from an attempt at a realisation of that, which can exist exclusively in the dimension of a calling: symbol – sacrament – icon. Their situation resembles the plight of those driven from paradise but, as Antoine Vergote correctly noted: *The loss of paradise is precisely the cipher of the symbolic world.*³³

The protagonists of *Stalker* experience a dramatic act of doubt, which marks the onset of each true journey-transformation. They resemble the observer on an island in the middle of the ocean in Herzog's film *Heart of Glass*: the first who "doubts" and sets off together with his companions in a boat far too small on an absurd journey to the end of the world (or perhaps they bear a resemblance to those companions?). They are like Gustav Aschenbach from Thomas Mann's novel – an artist whose "sense of order" was replaced by a "sense of mystery" directing him to the ultimate, the ecstatic. The gaze of the travellers standing on the threshold of the Room, directed towards the inner recesses of its impenetrable interior, recalls Aschenbach's last wish to follow Tazio's beckoning gesture into an immensity of richest expectation. The wish that Aschenbach fulfilled by dying and the Writer and the Professor by preserving life remains unfulfilled and thus persists in the dimension of a symbol.

This situation recalls also the puzzling failure of Odysseus, who permitted unfavourable winds to drive him away from the already near-by Ithaca. What steered him? Curiosity of the world, mentioned by Dante? Or rather despair, expressing doubt in Ithaca? Or perhaps loyalty to its essence:

*When you set out for Ithaka
ask that your way be long,
full of adventure, full of instruction. [...]*
*Have Ithaka always in your mind.
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.
But don't in the least hurry the journey. [...]*
*Ithaka gave you a splendid journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She hasn't anything else to give you.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka hasn't deceived you.
So wise you have become, of such experience,
that already you'll have understood what these Ithakas
mean.*

Constantine P. Cavafy, *Ithaca*

Endnotes

- ¹ Novalis, *Uczniowie z Sais (proza filozoficzna – studia – fragmenty)*, transl. Jerzy Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1984, p. 122.
- ² Walter Kasper, *Jeżus Chrystus*, transl. B. Bialecki, Warszawa 1983, p. 81. On the concept of the miracle in Christianity see: Rev. Marian Rusecki, *Cud jako znak i symbol*, "Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne", vol. XXVIII, fasc. 2, 1981, pp. 80-95; *Les miracles de Jesus*, X. Léon-Dufour (ed.), Paris

1977. Views of ancient and Early Christian authors about miracles in: Ewa Wipszycka, *Kościół w świecie późnego antyku*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 300-317 (chapter: *Cuda*). See also: Robert Wiśniewski, *Cuda i świętość*, "Mówią wieki", no. 2, 1996, pp. 16-19.

- ³ Mentioned by Walt Whitman in *Miracles*, a poem of great importance for the discussed question:
*Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of
the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night
with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer fore-
noon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so
quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.
To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the
same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.
To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—
the ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?*
- ⁴ Quoted after: Gijs Bouwman, *Czy możemy w dzisiejszych czasach oprzeć nasze życie duchowe na Biblii?*, "Concilium. Międzynarodowy Przegląd Teologiczny" (selected articles, 6 October 1969), Poznań-Warszawa 1970, p. 202.
- ⁵ In this manner the concept of the "miracle" is also influenced by the symbolic potential of "feeling" as "smell", i.e. a sense, which permeates that, which sight does not reach
- ⁶ Paul Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, transl. Jerzy Klinger, Warszawa 1964, p. 115. Matthew 17, 2: *Et transfiguratus est coram ipsis....*
- ⁷ Quoted after: Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *Przebóstwienie człowieka. Nauka świętego Grzegorza Palamasa w świetle tradycji prawosławnej*, transl. Iga Czaczkowska, Lublin 1997, p. 105.
- ⁸ Quoted after: Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Paris 1959, pp. 241-242. On the Transfiguration of the Lord see also: R. de Feraudy, *Licône de la Transfiguration, Etude suivie des Homélie d'Anastase le Sinaïte et de S. Jean Damascène*, transl. M. Coune and K. Rozemond, "Spiritualité Orientale" no. 23, 1978; Georges Habra, *La Transfiguration selon les Pères grecs*, Fontainebleau 1986.
- ⁹ *Stalker*, screenplay Arkady Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky based on motifs from the fourth chapter of the novel *The Roadside Picnic*; director: Andrei Tarkovsky; director of photography: Alexandr Kniazhinsky; main production designer: A. Tarkovsky; composer: Eduard Artmiyev. Cast: Alexandr Kaydanovsky – Stalker, Anatoly Solonitsyn – Writer, Nikolai Grinko – Professor, Alisa Freindlikh – Wife, Natasha Abramova – Martishka. Production: USSR – Mosfilm 1979.

- ¹⁰ All statements by Andrei Tarkovsky from: *Kompleks Tolstoja, Mysli o zyciu sztuce i filmie*, selected, prep. and transl. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1989 and: *Czas utrwalony*, transl. Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, Warszawa 1991.
- ¹¹ I use the word “metaphor” (a strictly linguistic concept) metaphorically in order to express a thought about the surplus of meaning. In doing so, I refer to Ricoeur’s reflections about the metaphor, *which is not an ornament of discourse. (...) A metaphor does not furnish any new information about reality. The metaphorical twist (...) can be taken as the model for the extension of meaning operative in every symbol – Metafora i symbol*, transl. Katarzyna Rosner, in: *Język, tekst, interpretacja*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 133, 136. See also Ricoeur’s other works on the metaphor, i.a. *La métaphore vive*, Paris 1975.
- ¹² E.M. Cioran, *L’indélicé*, in: *Le vide, Expérience spirituelle en Occident et en Orient* (“Hermès” 2, Nouvelle série), Paris 1981, p. 262.
- ¹³ Cf. Gabriel Marcel on restlessness, anxiety, and anguish.
- ¹⁴ Nicolai Berdiaev: *Toutes ces tendances vers une communion avec l’élément cosmique sexuel entraînent le renoncement à la lutte pour l’être personnel, pour les rapports personnels entre l’homme et Dieu et entre les hommes. Et rien ne saurait poser d’une façon plus profonde le problème de la spiritualité chrétienne.* – Nicolas Berdiaeff, *Esprit et réalité*, transl. from the Russian, Paris 1950, p. 192.
- ¹⁵ Hence a different declaration made by the author of *Stalker*: *When I create my images I use no symbolism of any kind. I want to create an image, not a symbol. That’s why I don’t believe in interpretations of supposed meanings of my pictures. I’m not interested in narrow political or social issues. I want to create images that would touch the viewer’s soul to some degree.* It has to be explained that Tarkovsky treated the symbol as an intellectual formula with a strictly defined meaning and contrasted to the poetic metaphor. See: Dariusz Czaja, *Tarkowski i symbol*, “Kwartalnik Filmowy” no. 9-10, 1995, pp. 107-113.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Kearney, op. cit.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Nancy Jay Crumbine, *On Silence*, “Humanitas. Journal of the Institute of Man Center for the Study of Human Development”, vol. XI, no. 2: 1975.
- ¹⁸ See: Marie-Madeleine Davy, *Silence et contemplation*, in: *La vie Bénédictine – Les raisons du silence*, no date, pp. 23-31.
- ¹⁹ Quoted after: Jean Greisch, *L’âge herméneutique de la raison*, Paris 1985, p. 238.
- ²⁰ A. Vergote, op. cit., p. 8. On “silence” see also: Bernard Dauenhauer, *Silence The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance*, 1980 (this study was discussed by Bogdan Baran, *Fenomenologia amerykańska, Studium z pogranicza*, Kraków 1990, pp. 115-120). On silence as a spiritual discipline see: Bernard Morel, *Méthode et religion. Essai sur la méthodologie ouvert et l’expérience de la transcendance*, Lausanne, *passim*, especially p. 250 sqq.
- ²¹ Beginning of the poem: *Auguries of Innocence* by William Blake.
- ²² Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Bóg bez bycia*, transl. M. Frankiewicz, Kraków 1996, p. 31: *the idol with its visibility fills the intention of the gaze, which wants nothing other than to see*; p. 40: *The icon, on the contrary, attempts to render visible the invisible as such, hence to allow that the visible not cease to refer to another than itself, without, however, that other ever being reproduced in the visible.*
- ²³ Just a single example: in one of the scenes the protagonists climb flooded stairs leading down and then up, and become submerged in water up to their necks. Obviously, this image brings to mind sacramental immersion in a Christian baptistery. In the successive scene they halt in a large interior filled with sand (or a similar substance) designed to resemble dunes characteristic for the landscape of a desert. The “baptistery” from the previous scene should be thus interpreted as an image of the Red Sea, traditionally treated as a prefiguration of baptism.
- ²⁴ This circumstance is accentuated by Louis-Marie Chauvet: *It is not outside, on the road, but inside, around the table, that the two disciples have the decisive experience of their encounter – Symbole et sacrement. Une relecture sacramentelle de l’existence chrétienne*, Paris 1987, p. 175.
- ²⁵ At this I point I would like to quote, by way of example, the lyrics of *Czajnik* (Kettle), a song by Wojciech Waglewski: *Not only in me. In you too
Lurks the note, the sound,
Which, God once whispered,
Would enable us to hear
Our Psalm...*
- ²⁶ *Metafora i symbol*, op. cit., p. 142.
- ²⁷ Similarly, the concept of the “world of text” proposed by Ricoeur contains the sort of distance introduced by literary fiction that eliminates within the text the direct (ostensible) reference to reality, its referential dimension. P. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutyczna funkcja dystansu*, transl. Piotr Graff, in: *Język...*, ed. cit., pp. 224-245.
- ²⁸ This moment of illumination, instantly changing into parting, was depicted by Rembrandt. A penetrating comment on the canvas: *Pilgrims at Emmaus (The Supper at Emmaus)* by Michel Prieur in: *Visage et personne. Contribution à l’établissement du statut ontologique de la représentation*, “Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale” no. 3: 1982, p. 321.
- ²⁹ Chauvet, op. cit. The brilliant French theologian-hermeneutist added: *They open on the emptiness of the invisibility of the Lord each time the Church breaks bread in memory of him; but this emptiness is penetrated by his symbolic presence (...). Jesus the Christ is absent as “the same”; he is no longer present except as “the Other”. From now on, it is impossible to touch his real body; we can touch it only as the body symbolized (...).*
- ³⁰ See: Richard Kearney, *Poétique du possible. Phénoménologie herméneutique de la figuration*, Paris 1984, p. 168.
- ³¹ According to *Stalker* they lacked faith. Meanwhile, Tarkovsky said: *Because although the heroes suffer an apparent defeat, each of them gains something incredibly important: faith...*
- ³² *For the act of resignation faith is not required, but it is needed when it is the case of acquiring the very least thing more than my eternal consciousness, for this is the paradoxical. (...) In resignation I make renunciation of everything, this movement I make by myself.* – Sören Kierkegaard, *Bojaźń i drżenie. Choroba na śmierć*, transl. J. Iwaszkiewicz, Warszawa 1982, p. 49.
- ³³ Antoine Vergote, *Interprétation du langage religieux*, Paris 1974, p. 68.

Just a minute! Can everything be mathematised? Does there exist in the world something that could not become the object of mathematical theory?¹

A math movie?

Just a single letter “ π ” –probably the shortest title in the history of the cinema. At the same time, rather perverse and ambiguous: we know that apart from being a particle of one of the natural languages this letter from the Greek alphabet is also a cryptonym of a certain number significant in mathematics. Basically, therefore, the title-letter proves to be actually a title-number. In addition, it is a strange and mysterious number. That last circumstance could prove to be even more curious. We remember from elementary school mathematics that π describes the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter, is constant, and – in an approximation needed for the purpose of calculations – totals 3,14. What is so extraordinary about this? For those whose mathematical knowledge does not exceed the elementary level (and be honest – that means for the majority of us) the answer is: probably nothing.

For mathematicians, however, π , once also known as the Ludolphian number,² does not cease being puzzling and disturbing, and remains a challenge for the inquisitive analytical mind. It turns out that its expansion after the comma is not a recurring decimal; in other words, no constant regularities can be observed in its course. Although it pertains to definite objects the number π is indefinite. It is also irrational. Despite the fact that with the assistance of the computer billions of numbers after the decimal comma have already been identified,³ a complete and finitely closed sequence is still missing. So far, everything seems to indicate that it is uncountable. The sequence of numbers after the decimal comma is infinitely open: writing down all those numbers would take up an eternity.⁴ Putting it succinctly: due to its very essence π aims at infinity.

For science π does not cease being an enigma. Although it appears to be a purely human construct it is regarded as a number from beyond human order. The biologist Darryl Rainey drew attention to the amazing affiliation between mythological imagery and mathematical intuition indicating the relations of the circle as a basic figure in the mythologies of assorted cultures and the mysterious value of π . The number 3,1415926... is infinite, and in mathematics constitutes the so-called value π , the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter. Looking at a circle we see one of the most constant values in mathematics. We may ask whether it is an accident that the circle is a symbol regarded in the myths of numerous cultures as the most magnificent and impeccable. Carl Jung was of the opinion that the mandala (Sanskrit for circle,

Cipher and Epiphany. Several Remarks on π

hence the motifs containing this scheme) is the most important religious symbol of mankind. Whenever the inner eye looks at a circle, e.g. a mandala, and gains the impression of perfection, then it sees the infinite number 3,1415926..., albeit from another level. It is quite possible that we correctly describe such numbers as transcendental.⁵ Therefore, π contains the idea of perfection and completeness and carries the promise of transcending beyond the finite, temporal dimension. Within the context of such statements it becomes less surprising that scholars decided to establish contact with extra-human intelligence, and in the hope of coming across a non-terrestrial civilisation transmit into space numbers of the decimal expansion of π .⁶ Apparently, π evades simple assignments and is situated somewhere along the border between “hard” science and quests that we are in the habit of describing as “paranormal”. From the cultural point of view its presence in both domains is important. There can be no doubt that our ordinary schoolroom: “three/fourteen hundred and sixteen” possesses a secret profoundness and an almost hypnotically powerful impact.

Regardless, therefore, of its purely mathematical parameters the number π has attained a certain autonomous value in contemporary symbolic space. The same thing happened to it as to Einstein’s famous equation: $E=mc^2$, whose mythological value was brilliantly disclosed by Roland Barthes. Both the brain of the creative physicist and his immortal product were rapidly inserted in the old esoteric image of science. The equation gained the status of a magic spell opening the door to the Sesame of wisdom: *There is a single secret to the world, and the secret is held in one word; the universe is a safe of which humanity seeks the combination: Einstein almost found it, this is the myth of Einstein. In it, we find all the Gnostic themes: the unity of nature, the ideal possibility of a fundamental reduction of world, the unfastening power of the world, the age-old struggle between a secret and an utterance, the idea that total knowledge can only be discovered all at once, like a lock which suddenly opens after a thousand unsuccessful attempts.*

The historic equation $E=mc^2$ by its unexpected simplicity, almost embodies the pure idea of the key – bare linear, made of one metal, opening with a wholly magical ease a door which had resisted the desperate efforts of centuries.⁷ Somewhat similarly to Einstein's equation the mysterious and unsolvable π functions at present as a sign of something more than a purely digital characteristic. It offers a tempting promise of breaking the code of "visible and invisible things" and of solving the mystery of existence. This key seems to be even simpler and less sophisticated than Einstein's equation: it suffices to merely discover certain regularity in the decimal expansion of π and we shall attain the threshold of the secret. The cultural significance of "3,14" bypasses the whole complication and finesse of mathematical calculations and has been as if added "above" the number itself. Unclear and puzzling, surrounded with a certain emotional aura, it became one of the recognisable numbers of contemporary anthology. In one of his interviews Darren Aronofsky admitted: *π has always fascinated me as a number. It's a really wild concept.*⁸ His film consciously refers to numerical mythology.

At the very onset let us exclude a certain misunderstanding that could emerge in the course of watching the film. Despite distinct cognitive ambitions and certain necessarily abbreviated references to numbers and mathematical searches this is no "math film", as film critics sometimes describe it, that would aspire to compete with mathematics taught at university. To put it in plain terms: the film might be quite boring and obvious for the average student of mathematics just as it could prove to be boring and obvious for every person with an even average knowledge of the secrets of Cabbalistic gematria. It is difficult to believe that such persons would regard information about the existence of the Fibonacci sequence or an elementary presentation of the principles of gematric correspondence as discoveries. One can, however, assume – and this is not an excessively light-hearted premise – that the percentage of mathematicians and Cabbalists in each population is not very high and, consequently, relatively low among the film audience. Aronofsky certainly did not produce his film with them in mind. The recipients are aptly described by the authors of an excellent book on the construction of computational complexity: the majority of people with at least elementary scientific training disclose an astonishing belief in the power of mathematics, envisaged as a tool that makes it possible to calculate the very essence of reality. One and one are two regardless whether we add ounces of flour or gunshots. The ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter is a mathematical constant and the magical number π (3,1315...).⁹ The film refers to precisely such a state of common consciousness. It is not a presentation of mathematics intended for mathematicians (just imagine such a plot!) but of

mathematics in a simplified dimension, a popular vision.

Aronofsky is perfectly well aware of the fact that the presented level of mathematical knowledge is rather unsophisticated: *It's pop math, really, everyone bought Chaos, that chaos book that everyone got stuck on the first three pages and then it became a doorstop or something. That's what the film is. It's like the first three pages of those cool math books.*¹⁰ A brief and, of necessity, superficial introduction to the world of numbers and Cabalistic calculations – remember that the cinema cannot stand lectures – is composed of merely slogans, call signs of the problems announced in the film. This is the beginning of a thread that we can follow in order to reach the heart of the story. Aronofsky does not resolve mathematical equations but uses an analytical probe to examine the state of contemporary awareness. That is his real theme.

The début film contains a distinctive stylistic signature. The rather simple story about an accomplished Jewish mathematician is told brilliantly. Aronofsky inscribes serious reflections about the condition of contemporaneity into a rather trivial scheme of an ordinary thriller. Nonetheless, he does so with enormous virtuosity. The convention of a thriller is treated with a certain distance and we are actually dealing more with a pastiche. What sort of a thriller is this in which a dubious Wall Street gang wishes to win the cooperation of a famous mathematician, and in which the thrills are produced at best by his periodic migraines? And yet the film adheres to the elementary determinants of the genre. The selection of such a convention and style of telling a story is, on the one hand, a film homage paid to the cinema of genres and, on the other hand, a vehicle that is only to tempt the spectator.

Aronofsky's ascetic and formally disciplined film builds an extremely evocative world of madness and hallucination. Numerous cuts produce an impressive and violent image capturing the senses and intensively penetrating the mind. Maintained consistently in a kaleidoscopic, uneven rhythm it matches ideally the progressing insanity of a brilliant mind, a process occurring right in front of us. The spectator is instantly compelled to examine reality through the eyes of a madman whose desperate and fragmented mind is vividly visualised by the frames of the depicted world, sometimes blurred and "upside down". If this is expressionistic poetics, and numerous stylistic elements indicate that this is the case, then it should be described more accurately as "hysterical expressionism".

This is a claustrophobic world, cramped and tightly clamping the protagonist's head in the manner of a steel band. The black-and-white tape and the sound track recalling indistinctly articulated industrial *murmurs, clusters and sequences* reinforce the impression of alienness, the unreal quality of the portrayed reality.

New York in ω is a space of alienation and fear. Totally different from the warm and nostalgic New York in Allen's *Manhattan*, it is filmed as a city-Moloch without any of its emblematic buildings but with unattractive streets and empty, suspicious looking subway passages. In contrast to Auster's *Brooklyn Boogie* with a local community of residents sharing daily, mundane problems we are shown a community devoid of all bonds; each person lives on his own and for himself, each takes part in an isolated world of nomadic beings. This is a gloomy, dark, and cold world. Or, in reference to the film's Cabbalistic motif, it is a world of broken vessels, a distant echo of *shevirat ha-kelim*, remote but maintaining a connection with its source.

All is number

Now, return to numbers, that astonishing cosmos of beings with a curious ontology. Only habit forces us to seek knowledge about the nature of contemporaneity in books written by researchers specialising in culture. After all, they too – whether they know it or not – are in the grasp of a paradigm, which they try to describe and analyse. Contrary to the meta-descriptive character of science they do not succeed in performing the Baron Munchhausen trick all that often. Sometimes, intuition preceding the findings of those who deal with culture professionally is preceded by literature. In Bohumil Hrabal's excellent autobiographical essay the enthralling motif of the number appears upon several occasions.¹¹

Hrabal's intuition reactivates daily reality but also places it in another light. We live in a world composed of numbers. Every day we move in space peopled with numbers. The hypertrophy of numbers each step of the way, almost everywhere, is so great that we almost fail to notice this fact and accept it as "natural" and as something that does not require reflection. Everything is weighed, measured, counted, as if contemporary culture had written its (ill-bidding?) *Mane, Tekel, Fares...* in all possible places and with multiplied effort.

What are these numbers? What is their nature? What does it mean: "our epoch is expressed only in numbers"? Had we, unconsciously, returned to old Pythagorean intuitions according to which the world is a number and can be described and comprehended *via* numerical relations?

The writings of Pythagoras of Samos are non-existent and their content is known only from secondary sources. Therefore, recall the concise and apt characteristic of Pythagorean ideas contained in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: *The so-called Pythagoreans, who were the first to take up mathematics, not only advanced this study, but also having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist*

and come into being-more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the modifications and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modeled on numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number. And all the properties of numbers and scales which they could show to agree with the attributes and parts and the whole arrangement of the heavens, they collected and fitted into their scheme; and if there was a gap anywhere, they readily made additions so as to make their whole theory coherent (I, 985 b and sqq.).

In other words, Pythagoras and his followers regarded the number as sacred (to mention perfect numbers or *tetraktys*) and as a tangible confirmation of the wonder of the divine-human world. In the spirit of the two halves of the Greek *symbolon* it was a keystone linking two realities. The Pythagorean maxim: *all is number* meant that the number was conceived as the beginning and the end, the pre-foundation, the *arche* of the whole comprehensible reality. In this magical-religious conception the cosmos of numbers created, slightly in the manner of Platonic *paradeigmata*, a world of ideal pre-models. The number makes possible cognition and leads to the discovery of the truth of reality. The condition for learning anything from existing things is pre-established harmony, the model of measure and proportion. Harmony is the source of the organisation of the world since we can become familiar only with that, which is orderly.

Hrabal's enumeration seems to suggest that the reality in which we live is Pythagorean, albeit *à rebours*. In daily experience the number fulfils only pragmatic, orientating functions. More, it conceals the truth of the thing despite the fact that according to the intentions of the collective, anonymous author, numerically marking all and everyone, the number was supposed to cast light on truth and accentuate and confirm it with an undisputed mathematical certificate. The number often becomes the name of a thing, its variable replacement (not to mention people-numbers from the horrific past of concentration camps). Those numbers from our daily life offer a semblance of precision, a commonplace equivalent of a scientific interpretation of the world. The aphorism created by common sense about the existence of small lies, big lies, and statistics corroborates this obvious fact by means of its curious gradation. The world of everyday experience is a world of numerical illusion. It creates a vast space built of numbers, a monstrous – in both meanings of that word – *simulacrum*. To put it more explicitly: it is

an unintentional joke about the eternal claims to precise reasoning made by mathematics and the desire to offer a true description of reality. The daily world full of digital references is a perverse variant of Pythagoreanism. True, we “actually” live in an anti-Pythagorean world. For us a number deprived of all sacral references fulfils the function of merely an ordinary identifier. It is a firm scaffold supporting elementary orientation in the world, without which life appears to be impossible. After all, it would be difficult to say that behind those orientation indices there stands some sort of cosmic harmony that binds all and everyone. The numerical world plays rather the role of a protective umbrella and is one of the means that tame the unknown and provide an illusion of controlling things.

Heidegger accused contemporary science of a similar attitude. Science, he claimed, does not think, but calculates. The effect of such an approach is a purely subjectivising attitude towards things. *Nature and history become the objects of a representing that explains.*¹² He who counts and subjectivises being seeks predominantly certainty.

Heidegger also drew attention to the fact that today the essence of the material is defined primarily by numbers. Meanwhile, the Greek *ta mathemata* originally denoted that, which is known *a priori* to a person co-existing with things, i.e. the corporeality of bodies or the plant-like character of plants. The same holds true for numbers. Discovering three apples on a table we know that there are three of them because we already knew the number three, “tertiary nature”. It is precisely in this non-quantifying sense that it is mathematical. Contrary to school routines mathematics does not find fulfilment in the vulgar gesture of counting and calculating: *Mathematics is mathematisation, to paraphrase Heidegger's celebrated: die Sprache spricht. It is thus both the conception and the birth of something essential (i.e. beings) “produced” by mankind and at the same time viewed and contemplated. It is theory, theorein – creative imagination.*¹³ Let it be stressed clearly: in its innermost, spiritually comprehended act mathematics is essentially contemplation.

The mad geometrician

Max Cohen, a brilliant Jewish mathematician, is obsessed with the world of numbers. He concentrates his entire life on studying numerical functions and finds fulfilment in mathematical calculations. Consumed by this preoccupation, he spends whole days in front of his super-computer in the hope of discovering a secret sequence of numbers describing the order of the world. Apparently, the old Pythagorean intuitions have found in him a brilliant performer. Cohen undoubtedly displays a reverent attitude towards numbers and their explanatory properties. The point of departure of the celebrated syllogism consists of three

premises: 1. Mathematics is the language of Nature, 2. The world can be presented and comprehended with the assistance of numbers, 3. Diagrams of system numbers reveal regularities. The conclusion is as follows: Nature is the domain of regularities. Evidence for their existence can assume the form of a number of phenomena whose occurrence seems not to be subjected to any regularities: recurring disease epidemics, the wax and wane of caribou populations, sunspot cycles or the rise and fall of the Nile. In each of those natural phenomena, at first glance chaotic and without any conspicuous order, it is possible to trace periodic repetitions.

Cohen discerns regularities in almost all natural phenomena and the arts. In this respect, detailed proof is supplied by the intriguing presence of phenomena from assorted orders, numbers from the so-called Fibonacci sequence (1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13... etc., each successive number being the sum of the two previous ones). Fibonacci numbers actually occur universally in Nature: leaves on branches grow at intervals, whose relations correspond approximately to the relations of Fibonacci numbers. Numerous flowers have a permanent number of petals: lilies – three, buttercups – five, calendulas – 13, asters – 21, etc., with all numbers belonging to the above-mentioned sequence. Sunflower seeds are arranged in the shape of spirals: as a rule, there are 34 dextrorotary spirals and 55 laevorotary ones, and both numbers come from the Fibonacci sequence. More: the quotients of two adjoining numbers from the same sequence (e.g. 144:133) consistently approach the golden ratio coefficient to be found in numerous examples of architecture (the Parthenon, the Pyramid of Giza); the golden ratio was applied by Leonardo ... It is simply impossible not to assume that numbers or, more exactly, certain particular numerical sequences govern the world.

Cohen becomes intrigued by the question whether stock market predictions are not subjected to identical dependencies that can be calculated. A world order, if it exists, must reveal itself not only in Nature but also in the world of human activity. After all, if one takes a closer look at the stock market it becomes apparent that it too is some sort of an organism. Just like a natural organism it is subjected to the law of growth and necrosis, and incessantly changes. The fact that it is a permanently living network legitimises a new hypothesis: the stock market is governed by a certain pattern concealed by numbers, a constant algorithm that has to be deciphered. Cohen embarks upon countless attempts to discover a numerical sequence describing the chaos of stock market oscillations of the prices of stocks and shares. The unearthing of this magic formula would mean not only comprehension of the present-day state of things but also the possibility of predicting future results on the stock market. The

goal appears to be quite close but Cohen's computer does not tolerate the calculation overload. The row of numbers appearing on the screen a moment prior to the collapse seems to be accidental. The printout with an incomprehensible sequence of slightly more than 200 numbers lands in a wastepaper basket.

Cohen's innovative works on statistics written during his early youth become universally known. His mathematical talents are so valuable that he unexpectedly becomes the object of interest of two entirely different milieus. He is pursued by analysts from a forecast office at the New York stock market and by a certain rather suspicious character named Lenny Meyer, who turns out to be an envoy of a Chassidic sect. Meyer presents the elementary principles of Hebrew gematry, according to which each letter corresponds to a certain numerical value. He cites the example of the Hebrew version of "The Garden of Eden", which in a numerical transcription totals 144, and "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" – a total of 233. In passing, Cohen notices that these are numbers from the Fibonacci sequence. Meyer likens the Torah to a cipher given by God, a holy writ with an unclear message that calls for exegesis. The Torah also contains the Name of God composed of 216 numbers but, unfortunately, the key to it had been lost. The situation becomes complicated and it appears that there is no return. Cohen starts to assume that there exists a single regularity governing reality as a whole. It could be applied not only in the case of the stock market but also to describe an essential characteristic and, finally, as a numerical cryptonym of God's name. He does not heed the warnings of his mentor – *you will start to see numbers in everything and as soon as you discard scientific rigor, you're no longer a mathematician, you're a numerologist* – and becomes immersed in his obsession with numbers, imagining that he is a mere few steps away from discovering the contemporary Holy Grail. Insanity is close.

For the Cohen *dramatis persona* Aronofsky applied a certain essential Faustian motif: insatiable desire for knowledge. But is Max Cohen simply a present-day Faust? Undoubtedly, his story contains distinct echoes of the Faustian myth.¹⁴ Apparently, Cohen's Faustian traits constitute an interpretation trail not so much misleading as unaware of what is most symptomatic in this character. We are tempted to perceive the brilliant mathematician through the prism of the land surveyor from Kafka's *The Castle*, who resembles him in many respects. The heart of the matter is not merely a simple directive that could guide us to such a trail: after all, Cohen's computer is named "Euclid" after the great legislator of geometry. There are also more important reasons: Cohen is not concerned with knowledge conceived as the growth of information. He wants to introduce order into reality, to capture it in

numerical parameters, to describe it with a digital sequence. In an excellent exegesis of *The Castle* Walter Hilsbecher, who perceives this novel predominantly as a drama of an impatient mind, describes the meaning of the work performed by K: *His profession consists of introducing order into that, which is disorderly, of measuring and dividing land and metaphorically: in the introduction into the uncertainty of being a particle of certitude, a guarantee of order, of granting structure to that, which is distant from structural order, and contours to that which is deprived of them, human contours comprehended in the manner of men and accessible to man.*¹⁵ Their prime aim is also similar – here the homonym of the Polish word: *zamek* proves to be helpful – to open a lock (*zamek*), i.e. to decode, and to capture a castle (*zamek*)...

Both experience their profession as a calling of sorts. Cohen seems to be chosen by the very fact of possessing a brilliant mind, a feature that gradually intensifies. The longer he works on discovering numerical regularities the stronger the feeling of a vocation (in a discussion held with a rabbi he shouts: *The number is nothing. It's the meaning. The syntax. It's what's between the numbers. You haven't understood it. It's because it's not for you. I've got it. I've got it! I understand it. I'm gonna see it. Rabbi, I was chosen.* The characteristic of K is similar: *He is a land surveyor. Nothing indicates that he would ever resign from the right to measure land, to carry out his profession, to fulfil his vocation (in a dual sense: also in the one stemming from the fact that the castle 'called' him). He is a man whose calling is to measure the unmeasurable even though it would prove impossible to be measured. It is precisely the unmeasurable that calls him and tempting him evades him – just like the castle.*¹⁶

Hilsbecher proposed an extremely original interpretation of the meaning of Kafka's castle, the object of the land surveyor's admiration: *The castle is the centre, the inaccessible stronghold of the irrational, which challenges ratio and evades it, the principal and contemnor of ratio, an extraordinary reality (judging by the effects) and mirage. The key to its secret remains unapproachable and the battle is waged in the forefield.*¹⁷ It would be difficult to seek a more adequate description of the sense and goal of Cohen's hopeless quest. Similarly, a characteristic of the surveyor's personality is an adequate portrait of the behaviour of Max Cohen: *K. is a man who takes things to heart. Since he frets about life his very existence becomes a heavy burden. He suffers because of existence, its non-transparency and irrationality, although it is precisely the immeasurability of being that should be a cause for merriment. This is not to say that he should resign from his attempt at rationalising: this is his calling. But he treats it much too seriously and devotes all his zeal, causing him to be suspected of impatience. Impatience is one of the cardinal sins.*¹⁸

Hilsbecher aptly extracted K's deadly sin: impatience. By introducing into his remarks the aphorism formulated by Kafka in *Reflections on Sin, Suffering,*

Hope, and the True Way, he commented the significance of the surveyor's failure: "It was because of impatience that they were expelled from Paradise; it is because of indolence that they do not return", Kafka wrote about people. Then he corrected himself: "Perhaps there is only one cardinal sin: impatience. Because of impatience we are driven out of Paradise; because of impatience we cannot return".

What did their impatience consist of? They wished to know. And in order to know, they ate from the Tree of Knowledge.

Did Kafka, while performing a *salto morale* of resignation thus condemn the desire for knowledge, ratio? This assumption is negated by K.'s resentment of the peasants' comatose state and by his vocation. An impatient longing for knowledge is the essence of people's "cardinal sin". Who can say that access to the tree of knowledge has been refused for all eternity? Or that patience will not be rewarded by a slow alleviation of the prohibition, a slow maturity towards cognition? This is certainly an infinite process but patience could offer it peaceful progress. (...) Ratio also must develop and the possibilities of its employment have to be carefully considered; it too must control itself – oppose the danger of conceit and impatience, mindful of the fact that it is traversing an endless path.¹⁹

This pride and impatience are confirmed also in the most important story, a *sui generis* biographical myth of Cohen: *When I was a little kid, my mother told me not to stare into the sun. So once, when I was six, I did.* As a result he almost became blind and started suffering persistent headaches, which recurred when he was an adult. This story, however, can be interpreted less literally and in a symbolic perspective be seen as a pre-figuration of essential moments in the boy's later life. Hence the legible motifs of the Sun and the violation of the prohibition will become a discernible film variation of the tragic myth of Icarus. Cohen certainly possesses some of the traits of Faust. But an even more apt characteristic seems to be: a geometrician with the Icarus complex. It is difficult not to notice that the protagonist of ω bears the same sort of tragic stigmata, a pre-established fatalism.

A Great Code

Films do not arise in a mental void. To a lesser or greater degree they are a visual exteriorisation of that, which is "in the air", with which contemporary thought is concerned. The questions that ω proposes for consideration coincide with a special moment in Western culture. For some time since the discoveries made by Crick and Watson we have been aware of four basic components of the genetic code and the relations between them. We are also familiar with a model of the atom discovered by Rutherford. Today, the years-long project of deciphering the biochemical contents of the human genome is coming to an end.

A group of outstanding Jewish mathematicians has announced the outcome of its research – up to now not undermined by anyone – into the existence of a Biblical code. Certain physicists maintain that the so-called general theory of everything is already within our reach. We live at a time of impatient expectation. We are waiting for the breaking of the last code, the removal of the last seal from a parcel containing data about ultimate meaning. Apparently, we believe that we are participating in the final act of a great drama of depriving the world of its secret. The curve of cognition is asymptotically coming close to the line marking Truth, and almost touching its edge. One moment more and the impossible will become the possible. There will come a time of great decoding. The revelation of all mysteries and the announcement of the sense of Everything – those are the legible signs of ultimate times. The Greek *apocalypsis* means "revelation" but also the "disclosure" of the meaning of a certain secret. It is also in this etymological sense that we can describe the present-day moment in culture as a time "just before" the apocalypse. Aronofsky's film without doubt intentionally refers to this state of the awareness of the contemporary world. The director has brilliantly sensed the atmosphere of anticipation for a spectacular *grande finale* dominating in the Western world, and has noticed an almost universal Kafkaesque impatience, that deadly sin of mankind. Aronofsky, a New York Jew from Coney Island, attaches particular importance to the discovery of Biblical codes in the Torah and the ensuing intellectual foment (together with its eschatological subtexts) amidst the Jews of America and Israel.²⁰ This was, he confirms, one of the essential points of departure for the construction of the scenario.

And yet the answer proposed by Aronofsky as regards the necessity and possibility of cognition appears to be distant from unambiguity.

First take a look at several doubts. ω forces to tackle a number of elementary questions concerning the nature of reality. Does Someone send us letters written in invisible ink and telegrams with an unclear content, or do we grant them meaning by asserting *ex post* that these are communiqués "not from this world"? Doing so, we submerge ourselves in signs that we had produced, rather unconvincing proof for the existence of a Source dispatching coded letters in bottles. In other words: does reality disclose holy contents in an unknown language requiring interpretation and behave like the Delphi oracle that "gives signs", or is the world suffering from an ontological muteness and all that we decipher from it tells us exclusively about the contents of our cognitive apparatuses? To put it in yet another way: is Someone really writing texts in a secret language addressed to us – in that case reading them seems to be a serious undertaking worth the

effort – or does this correspondence have the same author and addressee and thus all endeavours at decoding its transcendent sense resemble a tragic farce? A genuine metaphysical horror.

The rationalistic decree describes doubts of this sort as childish. While discussing man's "hermeneutic" inclination towards deciphering profound meanings produced by the world Leszek Kołakowski defended the stance of the "cryptologists" and "coders". He conducted a fervent polemic with the Enlightenment tradition, which imposed harsh restrictions upon questions of this sort: *We have never stopped asking such questions, and most likely never will. We shall never be free of the temptation to perceive the universe as a book in secret code to which somewhere there is a key... And why indeed should we want to be free of this temptation, which has proved the most fruitful source of cultural growth in all civilizations except our own (at least insofar as its dominant trend is concerned)? And what is it that confers supreme validity on the verdict that forbids us this research? Only the fact that our civilization, that has to large extent abandoned this, has proved immensely successful in some respects but in many others it has failed pathetically.*

One might ask why, if the universe is indeed a secret book of the gods with a coded message for us, this message is not written in ordinary language rather than in hieroglyphics whose decoding is discouragingly arduous and, above all, never results in certainty?

But this question is futile for two independent reasons. First, it assumes that we do know, or can imagine what the universe were like if its message and meaning were clearly readable and unambiguously displayed before our eyes. But we do not know this, and we lack the kind of imagination. Second, it is possible that if we knew why the message is hidden, or partly hidden – that concealment of the reasons for which it is hidden is a necessary part of its being hidden.²¹

Naturally, Kołakowski is right. The temptation to treat the world as a code, a puzzle to be solved, appears to be a non-reducible disposition and no Enlightenment-era decrees can alter a single thing. After all, we can ask whether it follows that in our task of reading the "sacred ciphers" we are doomed to only two possible hermeneutic stands: the optimistic vision, whose sign could be Champollion, and the degenerate version, whose emblematic figure is Däniken? Is there no other way out than those two possibilities? Must the deciphering of "holy signs", the reversal of the matter of reality "to the right side", be always accused of naïveté and suspected of gnostic pride and cheap exclusivism? A certain response is offered by the final, ambiguous and symbolically open scene of the film,²² whose entire force comes from the fact that it is also semantically open.

Having already completed homemade "lobotomy" (the removal of a mysterious bulge from his temple) and thus having ended his suffering, Max Cohen sits

in front of his house. He gazes upwards with a rather absent, otherworldly glance, observing, as he did once before, branches swinging in the treetop. A shaft of light is trapped between the branches. It is this image that previously suggested the existence of patterns in Nature. But this time things are not the same. They have become an illegible hieroglyph, an equation without clear-cut properties. Cohen's face, however, lights up with a mysterious smile. Enlightened ignorance? This "comprehending" smile appears to contain knowledge about the hopelessness of efforts aimed at interpreting the mystery of the world in a numerical algorithm as well as a conviction that despite serious premises the world is not a key to the code. The sense of a thing does not have to be concealed and sometimes appears within the range of sight. The response to the world-code is the world conceived as epiphany. We witness an almost alchemical and spiritual transmutation: as if the Tree of Knowledge changed at this exact moment into the Tree of Life. Cohen seems to finally understand the teachings of his mentor, Robeson, who while playing go drew his attention to the need of not thinking too much, indicating intuition as the key to profoundest cognition.

Now the heart of the matter is not to perceive the world as a code, a puzzle, and a hieroglyph to which one matches a key, gives the correct result or produces an adequate translation into a comprehensible language and thus reduces the unknown to the known and actually appropriates the mystery; it is a special sort of "reading". This process of reading and deciphering has nothing in common with decoding a ciphered message. We use the conceit of a code in those situations when we know that the concealed meaning can be basically, sooner or later, grasped. It consists rather of an exteriorisation of the spiritual message, entrusting its secret and following its voice. Deciphering is not tantamount to breaking a code, the destruction or deconsolidation of a secret. On the contrary: deciphering the world revealed in a hieroglyph respects the existence of the secret and its essential imperviousness to any sort of explanation. To "read" the hieroglyph in the above-presented fashion means to continue existing in the interior of the secret, to be not before it or in relation to it, but within it.

There exists such a meaning of reality that cannot be calculated and enclosed in a numerical formula. There also exists such a meaning of reality whose private deciphering does not provide convincing intersubjective proof that something is really "there". There is also such a meaning of reality, which cannot be resolved as if it were a puzzle but can be comprehended by intensive, earlier prepared perception. In order to be cognitively productive the latter must possess all the features of ecstatic contemplation. It seems futile to add that the condition for such contemplation is

total and unconditional impartiality. Thanks to it, and in it, one can simply see sense that does not succumb to discursive tooling or numerical calculations. Rilke's *Introduction to The Book of Images*, and in particular the captivating fragment that literally concerns the act of seeing a tree, is an excellent account of such experience and its essential impermanence:

*Whosoever thou art! Out in the evening roam,
Out from thy room thou know'st in every part,
And far in the dim distance leave thy home,
Whosoever thou art.
Lift thine eyes which lingering see*

*The shadows on the foot-worn threshold fall,
Lift thine eyes slowly to the great dark tree
That stands against heaven, solitary, tall,
And thou hast visioned Life, its meanings rise
Like words that in the silence clearer grow;
As they unfold before thy will to know
Gently withdraw thine eyes.*²³

The glimmer of momentary illumination reveals – yes, reveals, and the ambiguity of this verb is significant – the sense of the Whole, shattered into fragments and thus earlier inaccessible. Emerging from darkness it glistens for the blink of an eye in the fissure of concealment, and then returns to it. The fleeting character of this experience and its, by the very nature of things, passing nature does not in any way diminish its poignant reality. Contrary to assorted idealisms, the truth – naturally, not in its aletheic meaning but according to an adequacy comprehension – is not concealed somewhere in an inaccessible cocoon of the noumen nor does it lie “beyond the horizon”. It is given “here and now” in rare revelations, in viewing that annuls the customary subject-object, spiritual-sensual, etc. contrasts, and which starts with sensual observation but a moment later “leaves the senses” for the sake of meaning and word that *in the silence clearer grow*. It is in this single and indivisible act of cognition that the sense of the word can reveal itself and exist in the full meaning of the word.

The rest is... computation.

Endnotes

- ¹ After: P.J. Davis, R. Hersh, *Ograniczenia matematyki*, transl. J. Skolimowski, in: *Skarby matematyki*, ed. T. Ferris, Warszawa 1998, p. 140.
- ² From the name of the Dutch mathematician Ludolph van Ceulen (1539-1610).
- ³ Cf. I. Ekeland, *Chaos*, transl. M. Jarosiewicz, Katowice 1999, p. 27; A.D. Aczel, *Wielkie twierdzenie Fermata*, transl. P. Strzelecki, Warszawa 1998. It is worth noting upon this occasion the archaic nature of interest in the numerical value of π : *PI was known to within various*

approximations to the Babylonians and Egyptians of the second millennium B.C. Interest in this number is connected naturally with the invention of the wheel. They took it as roughly three, and it arose naturally as a consequence of the discovery of the wheel. Pi also arose in various measurements of a pyramid. Pi is even alluded to in the Old Testament – in Kings I, 7-23 we read about a circular wall being constructed. From the given number of units for the circumference and the diameter, we can conclude that the ancient Israelites took it to be roughly three, Aczel, op. cit., p. 30.

- ⁴ Aczel, op. cit., p. 29.
- ⁵ D. Reaney, *Śmierć wieczności. Przyszłość ludzkiego umysłu*, transl. W. Szelenberger, M. Szwed-Szelenberger, Warszawa 1993, p. 209 and 226.
- ⁶ S. Stein, *Potęga liczb*, Warszawa 1997, p. 208.
- ⁷ R. Barthes, *Mitologie*, transl. A. Dziadek, introd. K. Kłosiński, Warszawa 2000, pp. 123-125.
- ⁸ J. Berardinelli, *Darren Aronofsky's Piece of the π* .
- ⁹ P. Coveney, R. Highfield, *Granice złożoności. Poszukiwania porządku w chaotycznym świecie*, transl. P. Amsterdamski, Warszawa 1997, p. 40.
- ¹⁰ A. Kaufman, *An Interview with Darren Aronofsky and Sean Gullette of "Pi"*.
- ¹¹ B. Hrabal, *Mój wiek*, transl. A. S. Jagodziński, Warszawa 1994, pp. 35-36, 39.
- ¹² M. Heidegger, *Czas światobrazu*, transl. K. Wolicki, in: *Drogi lasu*, transl. various authors, Warszawa 1997, p. 75.
- ¹³ K. Maurin, *Mistyka – matematyka – magia*, “Gnosis” no. 11:1999, p. 110.
- ¹⁴ Aronofsky himself drew attention to this rather obvious possibility, see: A. Kaufman, *An Interview...*
- ¹⁵ W. Hilsbecher, *Tragizm, absurd i paradoks*, selection and introduction S. Lichański, transl. S. Blaut, Warszawa 1972, pp. 110-111.
- ¹⁶ Hilsbecher, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-114.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ²⁰ On Biblical codes see the worthless and sensational: M. Drosnin, *Kod Biblii*, transl. J. Jannasz, Warszawa 1998 and the clearheaded and extraordinarily competent: J. Satinover, *Kod Biblii. Ukryta prawda*, transl. D. Konieczka, Bydgoszcz 1999.
- ²¹ L. Kołakowski, *Horror metaphysicus*, transl. M. Panufnik, Warszawa 1990, pp. 143-144.
- ²² Apparently, impatience is not the domain only of brilliant mathematicians but also of film critics. An interview with D. Aronofsky poses a ridiculous question: *What is the meaning of the end?*; it is difficult to tell whether it contains an unusual dose of ordinary inanity or boundless naiveté. Fortunately, the director did not fail: *One can comprehend the end of the film in many ways and I wanted people to propose various interpretations. Even I, Sean Gullette and Eric Watson wondered what it really signified, Wprawci widza w trans. Z Darrenem Aronofskym rozmawia Anna Draniewicz*, “Kino” no. 5:2001, p. 22.
- ²³ R.M. Rilke, *Poezje*, selection, transl. and foreword M. Jastrun, Kraków 1987, p. 35.

Film and the True State of Things

Obviously we are aware of the fact that a film's message can contain nearly all forms of artistic statement, some (music) applied directly, others (literature) potentially outright or completely transformed, and all adjusted to its needs. In this bizarre, always fascinating mish-mash of quotes we can effortlessly identify themes borrowed from literature, drama, poetry, painting, or even other films. At the same time, a film envisaged as a complete work inspires us to reflect that it may not signify much more than itself since its meaning may be similar to that of an object: after all, neither the former nor the latter has to appeal to our mind. On the other hand, both can, and this is usually the case, affect our silent ability to decipher and understand the world, and to imagine the co-existence of perceived objects, phenomena and people.¹

It is true that in our ordinary lives we lose sight of this aesthetic value of the tiniest perceived thing. It is also true that the perceived form is never perfect in real life, that it has always blurs, smudges, and superfluous matter, as it were. Cinematographic drama is, so to speak, finer-grained than real-life dramas; it takes place in a world that is more exact than the real world, wrote Merleau-Ponty². In what sort of events, therefore, can a film be embroiled? What sort of borrowings and quotes are involved: synthesis or antithesis of reality? Probably all works of art within the realm of culture, i.e. interpreted, are also directed against or towards something. How is it that – we ask further – sophisticated and strictly defined film reality simultaneously reduces and intensifies external reality?

Assuming that we still remember Andrzej Wajda's *Niewinni czarodzieje* (Innocent Sorcerers) it is worth recalling that the critics' reviews were not overly enthusiastic. With the exception of several interesting comments the majority accused Wajda of making an insufficiently cinematic film and predominantly questioned its authenticity.³

The contemporary reality presented in *Innocent Sorcerers* is highly irritating and provocative in its conciseness. The apathy and inertia of the young people, the ambitionless "cool cats" – a more peaceful version of the beatniks – is not assessed, not to mention subjected to negative criticism.

They exist. They listen to jazz. The mask of ostensible life and illusion grows denser every day. We shall not learn anything about them, because they play their "innocent" roles *vis à vis* each other and the reality they contest. Nor shall we find out anything about them because even feelings and love are but a slightly more sophisticated game, which becomes interrupted because its score, known in advance, discourages all further moves.

I do not believe in the bitterness of Wajda's protagonist, wrote Aleksander Jackiewicz, nor in the scepticism of his heroine. I even find it hard to believe in the probability of the nighttime situation enacted in a small bachelor's pad, where a boy and a girl play a platonic game of masks. I prefer to

*treat this motif of Innocent Sorcerers as a metaphor and a generalisation.*⁴

The entire film is also probably a metaphor, just as all contestation movements, including the one depicted by Wajda, are a specific form of metaphor and generalisation. Each countercultural current usually opposes the images and system of values of the dominating culture it had conceived. Protest against criticised values can assume the form of, e.g. dressing and behaving in a way that becomes either a caricature of the values in question or an entirely alternative lifestyle. Similar phenomena could be observed in the protest movements of the 1970s and today. This is why Bazyl, the film's main protagonist, decides not to quit the game or face the consequences of staying with the girl. He is not evil or twisted; after all, his dreams about a home and affluence do not seem to differ from the so-called "national average" of the period. At the same time, each adjustment of the mask may lead to an irreversible process of blending into the well-known background of surrounding reality. After all, right outside his bachelor pad an even more masked world has settled down, an arena of the game of ostensible life; this mundane reality is filtered by slogans full of a false unity of minds and hearts.

The film's title is also symptomatic, since "innocent sorcerers" are yet another particle of the Romantic vi-



Innocent Sorcerers by Andrzej Wajda

sion of solitude and incapability of achieving autonomy, with the artificial outer world forcing to seek enclosure and wait things out. This is the motif ever present in works by Byron, Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and the Romantics.

Their point of departure, wrote Juliusz Kleiner in his sketch: *Romantyzm, is discontent with present reality, established social relations, the outcome of heretofore culture. European culture resulted in a world that seems unnatural, evil, soulless, and moribund. It is requisite to escape from it or to transform it, and to reject the restrictions it imposes in the name of an ideal of liberty.*⁵

*Each day from dullest memories returning
of dull folk, dull events, to books and yearning
and loneliness, my spirit to beguile,
like a voyager cast away on a desert isle:
each day on different sides he strains his eye
in hopes a fellow-being to espy –
and ever night he goes back to his lair,
mad fellow! having but increased despair.
Love but thy lonely walls, nor tug thy chain,
for all thou dost achieve is greater pain.*

*All hail, my lair! Prisoned in secular time,
let's learn to be prisoners of our own free will –
shan't we find many an art our time to fill?
Wise men of ages past shut themselves up
poisons and medicines to brew and cup,
or to seek treasures from alchemic slime;
we're innocent young sorcerers, but still
let us seek drugs our foolish hopes to kill;
and if through books a way to death we win
let's bury our own souls for life therein!*⁶

The world depicted in Wajda's film with the "eye of the camera" is authentic. The clubs and cafés in which its protagonists meet were real and actually frequented by similar young people wearing the same distinctly overlong coats and baggy sweaters. The backstreets and courtyards where they aimlessly hang out and spontane-



Innocent Sorcerers by Andrzej Wajda

ously organise mini-shows – in the spirit of disorderly fun – are also genuine, as is the ecstatic jazz music they listen to and play. But it is precisely Wajda's film that is neither a dispassionate documentary record of one of the forms of the contestation movement of the day nor a plot-driven anecdote with a neat moral. Instead, it is a bizarre dance of appearances, a truly unreal game – every film is a game played with the appearances of reality – filled with unnecessary motion and words. It seems to be a film not about things or people, but about the distance between them, invisible in everyday life. This is film reality but one carrying an excess load, faulty, and resembling the outcome of an overexploitation of material.

The idea we have of the world, wrote Merleau-Ponty, *would be overturned if we could succeed in seeing the intervals between the things (for example, the space between the trees on the boulevard) as objects and, inversely, if we saw the things themselves – the trees – as the ground.*⁷

Is this the inversion we discern in the discussed film? And yet the appearing image and recorded reality cannot be endowed with those qualities. The image itself, not to mention the film image, does not offer such a direct opportunity, just as we do not have a direct opportunity to render, e.g. the essence of silence by using word or sound. We can, however, describe the phenomenon while, obviously, violating its reality and going beyond the structure attributed to it.

Ostatni dzień lata (*The Last Day of Summer*) directed by Tadeusz Konwicki is a film about two people meeting on a strip of no man's land, a barren desert, a border in the most literal meaning of the word.

The tale is set amidst sandy dunes, between sea and land and sand and water, along a territorial frontier whose impassability is guarded by jets patrolling the sky. *The border is created (...) by a narrower or wider belt of uncultivated land, wild or semi-wild, legally or customarily separated from adjacent areas.*⁸ In a ritual sense, a border is the area furthest from the sacred. The interdependence of the sacred and the borderland is also intriguing, since: *... Borders and holy places have – each in its own way – the character of areas where unfettered sacredness manifests itself. They also remain in direct relations with each other.*⁹ Demons, the ghosts of those who died a tragic death, lunatics, suicide victims and unborn children usually buried there, all the "rejected", roam the borderland. This is a dangerous expanse in a dual meaning of the word – it directly adjoins the demonic external world and the force distinguishing it is equal to the one dominating the sacred centre.

In this film the formulated image of the world also succumbs to inversion. Here too we come across an identical motif of loneliness, powerlessness, and seclusion. Once again we discover something in-between the tangle of ostensible gestures, the flood of words, the subtle game, the excess of things.

This strip of genuine no man's land, a borderland, absorbs two people who are literally lonely if only because they are the only protagonists in the film. We follow their game set against the background of highly concrete, static space. Here, words rarely have something in common with gestures and complement each other just to show the invisible area of meanings between them.

...The man begins to automatically flick sand off the woman's back.

Man: *I just want to tell you that I am completely alone.*

Close-up of the woman's back. The man's hand is brushing off tiny sand grains.

Man: *And I achieved nothing in life.*

The boy begins stroking the clean surface of her back. His fingertips move along the spine's vertebrae. The woman's back begins to shiver barely noticeably.

Woman: *And what are you doing here?*

Man: *Nothing. I am wandering... looking for...*

Woman: *A way to get out?*

Silence. Sound of hiccups.

Man: *Sorry... Where can one run away to? Maybe you know?*

The woman impulsively pushes his hand away. She adjusts her top and stands up.

Woman: *Stop it. I don't like this¹⁰.*

Their meeting and contact are accidental, fleeting, and just as uncertain as the dugout on a dune, with a shirt spread across a bush, where they hide to wait out the rain. This is no longer a cave convenient for a getaway or an apartment where "innocent sorcerers" can safely play their game but a poor substitute of a home amidst dunes and the ghosts of memories surrounding them. Words follow once more, or rather a game played with words and gestures.

...The man holds her in his arms, as if to protect her from the rain.

Man: *Move further in, we have to wait it out somehow. At least we have a roof.*

Woman: *In a desert like this we shall be completely soaked.*

(...) They slide in deep under branches and lie down next to each other. They are still breathing fast. The woman looks into his eyes. He holds her in his arms. (...)

Woman: *Oh, what rain, such a terrible downpour; look, I don't think it's ever going to stop... In the end we'll both drown.*

Close-up of the woman's face with a heavy drop falling on her cheek. Frightened, she gazes in the boy's direction and speaks rapidly and chaotically, to prevent the situation she fears...¹¹

Once again the space covered by the camera is unquestionably authentic. The dunes, the sea, the jets flying by are all real as are the people in a never-ending dance of appearances, gestures, touches, and conver-



The Last Day of Summer by Tadeusz Konwicki

sation. If this dance had been rendered more rhythmic and granted greater transparency by repeating the same phrases, the result would have been undoubtedly *Salto*, another film by Konwicki, in which Kowalski-Malinowski demonstrates a dance *cum figuris*, gestures that do not mean a thing on the dance floor, but then again, can they signify something?

The two films feature some sort of an imperceptible space between things, whose presence is the reason why screen reality, the whole realism of events, turns into a game of appearances. Somehow it forces the viewers to look for additional meanings, more comprehensible ap-positions, somewhere already beyond the film frame and even beyond what the film is about.

According to Merleau-Ponty, *camouflage is the art of masking a form by blending its principal defining lines into other, more commanding forms.*¹² And yet the film and the film image are not only internally camouflaged form and content existing on the outside; most of all, they constitute images, as if the centre of the two extremities.

Does this mean that when examining film image, analysing it from the viewpoint of form and contents, in other words, studying both the deeply hidden and the external, we have in mind emergent and fleeting film images, brutal in their concreteness? While busy pursuing content and form are we not losing the very value that is of utmost importance but cannot be reduced to image alone?

Briefly: film image is always real and contains the same amount of the set designer's patience, the director's concept, and the actor's performance as it does of accidentally intruding reality. Nonetheless, it is something that does not actually exist and that once recorded on film or magnetic tape cannot be repeated or changed but just played.

Film image is not static not only because it is in motion but also because the fragment of filmed reality it contains is rendered dynamic and significantly marked by the rhythm of subsequent takes. True, such rhythm generally remains in accordance with the logical se-



The Last Day of Summer by Tadeusz Konwicki

quence known and comprehended in everyday experience, but newly created reality has nothing in common with its everyday counterpart.

*That what rhythm encompasses, wrote Leśmian, becomes immortal and unwittingly escapes earthly laws. Objects swept away by the flowing stream of rhythm discover sudden and unexpected immortality.*¹³

I believe that we are dealing here with a highly intriguing problem and consider attempts aimed at identifying the differences and shared qualities of film image and reality to be among the most interesting reflections on film.¹⁴ They involve material best at transferring reality and emergent exact images.

We might say that we don't know how to think of the connection between a photograph and what it is a photograph of, declared Stanley Cavell. The image is not a likeness; it is not exactly a replica, or a relic, or a shadow, or an apparition either, though all of these natural candidates share a striking feature with photographs – an aura or history of magic surrounding them.

(...) Whereas we are not accustomed to seeing things that are invisible, or not present to us, not present with us; or we are not accustomed to acknowledging that we do (except for

dreams). Yet this seems, ontologically, to be what is happening when we look at a photograph: we see things that are not present. (...)

Photography overcame subjectivity (...) by automatism, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction.

*But what photography obtained is not presence. It obtained the world, agreed, but only one of its possibilities. The reality in photograph is present to me while I am not present to it; and a world I know, and see, but to which I am nevertheless not present (...) is world past.*¹⁵

Does this not recall one of those instructive lessons received by Alice when travelling across Wonderland?

*"Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin" thought Alice; "but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in my life!"*¹⁶

The grin that remained on a tree branch just a minute ago belonged to a cat. Does it still belong to the cat or is it simply just a grin? If the latter is the case then it is already a smile-generalisation, an essence and, simultaneously, something that cannot exist in reality.

What is the film image then? A reflection of existing reality or perhaps its essence revealed? After all, only the

grin itself, however paradoxical this may seem, offers us the opportunity to experience the essence of the grin as if “in itself”. Only the film image, or actually everything it means, can make us aware of a certain feature of experienced reality even though I am absent in that image.

An equally paradoxical fact is discernible in film studies: the disclosure of closeness with such cultural phenomena as myth, symbolic thinking, fairy tale, ritual, or rite sometimes has to be conciliated with the technique of registering, the technical option of developing a true image of reality. Oneirism meets mechanical, dispassionate documentation.

Perhaps the cinema – to quote Pasolini – is based on an irrational linguistic instrument, *and this explains the deeply oneiric quality of the cinema, and also its concreteness as, let us say, an object, which is both absolute and impossible to overlook*.¹⁷

Image-signs, according to this intriguing proposal, are a unity based on a highly significant opposition: archetypal complements and visual reality. And once again the extraordinary nature of the film image reveals itself in all its complexity. We can be familiar with, or more specifically name, all of its elements. We can also presume what it is composed of, but its meaning continues to evade us. We still cannot define its function or the reality it exists in. This somewhat resembles a linguistic task, an attempt at deciphering a sentence in an unfamiliar language using only a dictionary making it possible to read words without any knowledge of the rules of grammar or potential idioms. And this is the form that the film image has been assuming most frequently.

Recalling terminology connected with the sense of sentences and idioms let us try to expand our reflections so as to include connections between the film image and poetics. After all, it was the film that, not by any means through selected words and apt measures as if established by law, led to the formation of images of reality, “the real images of things”.

By paraphrasing a quote I refer to one of the canons of ancient and Renaissance poetics, since we are trying to compare film, and the image in film, to the *rerum simulacra* rule, the essence of art, the unattainable idea of poetry. After all, this is an inherent quality of film and, paradoxically, its innate feature, “technical nature”.

*The function of a poet, a Renaissance presentation of poetics maintains, is to use speech and poems – entangled in a decorative and rich whole – to recreate human behaviour, activities, accomplishments and places on earth, human communities, location of countries, rivers, rotation of stars, nature of the world; to use signs with a figurative meaning to recreate states of mind and the agitation of hearts...*¹⁸.

Delving more deeply into the very meaning of the Latin *rerum simulacra* we can interpret *rerum* (genitive plural of *res*) as: things, objects, something, as well as the world, universe, and nature; meanwhile, *simulacra* (plural of *simulacrum*) denotes images and portraits, but also

a dream apparition, a shadow of a dead man, an image of character, a phenomenon, a spectre, an illusion.

Since a real image of things has been created, Kracauer and Benjamin were right claiming that the film image is dominated by a physical and material picture of the world. On the other hand, Morin and Susan Langer were just as correct when comparing film to a dream or to archaic cave paintings. Finally, Pasolini was right while discussing death, film and montage.

Until I die, Pasolini wrote, no one can guarantee to really know me, that is, to be able to give meaning to my action, which therefore, as a linguistic moment, can be deciphered only with difficulty. It is therefore absolutely necessary to die, because, so long as we live, we have no meaning, and the language of our lives (with which we express ourselves and to which we therefore attribute the greatest importance) is untranslatable; a chaos of possibilities, a search for relations and meanings without resolution. Death affects an instantaneous montage of our lives; that is, it chooses the truly meaningful moments (which are no longer modifiable by other possible contrary or incoherent moments) and puts them into a sequence, transforming an infinite, unstable, and uncertain present into a clear, stable, certain, and therefore describable past. (...)

*Montage thus accomplishes for the material of film (constituted of fragments, the longest or the shortest, of as many long takes as there are subjectivities) what death accomplishes for life*¹⁹.

In other words, *what is affected by rhythm becomes immortal*, as Leśmian wrote. Everyone, Różewicz added, *carries within a stock of colourful and colourless films. Each film is edited only in the memory of a single man and perishes together with him. Timid attempts at recounting during the lifetime and projecting after death are always doomed to fail. The light, the takes, the angle shots and the dialogues are all false*.²⁰

These examples make it possible to present a much more interesting interpretation of the meaning of the memorable single-take closing sequence of *The Passenger*. For long minutes the camera performs a remarkable somersault, “leaving” the room, “squeezing” through the bars, and “returning” to the same interior after the protagonist had already passed away.

Now, return to our focal reflections about the essence and meaning of the image in film and the ways it can be interpreted. All mentioned views about the nature or specific character of the film image, albeit dissimilar, ideally match the *rerum simulacra* formula according to its expanded comprehension. The film’s real image contains the same number of perfectly reflected objects, things, and images as that of shadows, illusions, and dream apparitions, and the same number of images of the world and nature as that of diverse, mythic, and mythological concepts about their existence.

The real image of things, however, is not an accumulation of the objects or shadows, which simply cannot be separated.

It is not enough, declared the Renaissance scholar Conradus Protucius Celtis, *to encompass a certain number of syllables within a defined measure if in this metre – with the aid of diversified and appropriate figures – [the author] did not express the real image of things and portray it so strikingly that the words themselves come alive and carry the force of granting objects life, so that it would seem that through writing they again come into being. The greatest glory of a writer is to create an impression that while writing he produces and brings forth into the light something, which apparently has never existed before.*²¹

But while a writer, a poet, has to use selected words so that seemingly heretofore non-existent things might exist anew, a director faces a different situation: he applies the photographic nature of his work, calling for different rhythm and logic as well as a different way of creating the “real image of things”.

In the introduction to this sketch I attempted to describe two films while intentionally seeking comparisons to phenomena existing outside the film image, Romantic symbolism, the anthropological concept of space, other films, and problems of contemporary mass culture. I did not claim, however, that without these supplements it is impossible to interpret or comprehend the film’s content, the life existing in it and as if already beyond our world. Have I, in the face of the merely outlined complexity of the film image, actually strayed from what a moment ago has been described as the “real image of things”?

It is impossible to once again translate the reality contained in film image into concrete terminology, to describe it anew with some sort of an external language of images. Here too we have to conduct – I resort to a word with erratic meaning – a montage of the reality of the film images surrounding us, a search for points of reference, which alone make the world of “real images of things” come into being as an instrument of cognition.

Images, according to Mircea Eliade, by their very structure are multivalent. If the mind makes use of images to grasp the ultimate reality of things, it is just because reality manifests itself in contradictory ways and therefore cannot be expressed in concepts. (...)

It is therefore the image as such, as a whole bundle of meanings, that is true, and not any one of its meanings, nor one alone of its many frames of reference.

*To translate an image into a concrete terminology by restricting to it any one of its frames of reference is to do worse than mutilate it – it is to annihilate, to annul it as an instrument of cognition.*²²

Naturally, it is better to say that we know that a film’s message contains nearly all forms of artistic statement. And that in this bizarre, always fascinating scrapheap of quotes, thefts or inspirations we can effortlessly identify literature, drama, painting, poetry, or simply other films and, let us add, a disturbing excess of reality.

According to Merleau-Ponty it is impossible to misuse film, just as it is impossible, we should add, to mistreat the film image when making attempts at its interpretation. Therefore, *after the technical instrument has been invented, it must be taken up by an artistic will and, as it were, re-invented before one can succeed in making real films.* Just, let us add, as we can hope to achieve the real image of things in film.²³

Endnotes

- ¹ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Film and the New Psychology*, in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. H. Dreyfus and P. Dreyfus, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill 1964, p. 58
- ² Ibidem, p. 58.
- ³ Cf. Barbara Mruklik, *Andrzej Wajda*, Warszawa 1969.
- ⁴ Aleksander Jackiewicz, *Maski*, „Film” 1961, no. 1.
- ⁵ Juliusz Kleiner, *Romantyzm*, in: *W kręgu historii i teorii literatury*, selection and prep. Artur Hutnikiewicz, Warszawa 1981, p. 185.
- ⁶ Adam Mickiewicz, *Forefathers’ Eve: parts one and two*, trans. from the Polish by Count [Władysław] Potocki of Montalk, Right Review, London 1944, p. 12.
- ⁷ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Film and the New Psychology*, p. 48-49.
- ⁸ Stefan Czarnowski, *Podział przestrzeni i jej rozgraniczenie w religii i magii*, in: *Dziela*, vol. III, Warszawa 1956, p. 227.
- ⁹ Ibidem, p. 229.
- ¹⁰ Tadeusz Konwicki, *Ostatni dzień lata*, in: *Scenariusze filmowe*, Warszawa 1966, pp. 61-62.
- ¹¹ Ibidem.
- ¹² M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Film and the New Psychology*, p. 49.
- ¹³ Bolesław Leśmian, *U źródeł rytmu*, in: *Szkice literackie*, prep. and introd. Jacek Trznadel, Warszawa 1959, p. 74.
- ¹⁴ More in: Zofia Woźnicka, *Problem kreacji i reprodukcji w filmie*, *Studia z teorii filmu*, vol. IX, Wrocław 1983,
- ¹⁵ Stanley Cavell, *Sights and Sounds* in: *Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Harvard University Press 1979, pp. 22-23.
- ¹⁶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, chapter VI, *Pig and Pepper*.
- ¹⁷ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Burnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise Burnett, Bloomington, Indiana UP 1988, p. 169.
- ¹⁸ Cf. Conradus Protucius Celtis, *De compositione materiali carminum* in: *Ars versificandi et carminum*, Lipsiae 1486, Quoted in: *Poetyka okresu Renesansu*, selection, introd. and prep. Elżbieta Sarnowska-Temeriusz, Wrocław 1982, p. 6.
- ¹⁹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Heretical Empiricism*, p. 236.
- ²⁰ Tadeusz Różewicz, *Morze*, in: *Proza*, Wrocław 1973, p. 79.
- ²¹ Conradus Protucius Celtis, *De compositione...*, p. 8
- ²² Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet, Princeton University Press 1991, p. 15.
- ²³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Film and the New Psychology*, p. 59.

And that was just the trouble: fascinating irrelevancy. “Sometimes inscriptions and dates are found upon buildings, or printed placards most irrelevant, are discovered upon their walls: sometimes a distant sundial is seen, and upon it – unconsciously recorded – the hour of the day at which the view was taken”. To judge from his commentaries, Fox Talbot enjoyed such incidents. At the same time they were troublesome, for they meant that the instrument was only partially under control, recording disinterestedly despite of its operator’s intentions.

Ian Jeffrey²

We may acknowledge that the famous photograph by Hippolyte Bayard: *Self-portrait as a Drowned Man* (and the message added on the reverse)³ is not exclusively the outcome of the fact that Louis Daguerre enjoyed the splendour and money associated with the invention of photography (daguerreotype). The openly ironic text that accompanies the photograph – *Ladies and gentlemen, you’d better pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell* – makes it possible to assume that Bayard was perfectly aware that a photograph can “lie” and that the meaning of a photographic image is not literal and invariable. If this is the case then it has to be said that the question of meaning and its unsteadiness in photography emerged together with the latter and from that time accompanies us, although undoubtedly thinking about this phenomenon is constantly subjected to certain complications and grows more refined.

One of the first thorough “discussions” concerning meaning in photography is the film *Blow-up* by Michelangelo Antonioni (1967). The debate is even more interesting since it had been conducted precisely with reference to the “language of images”.

*Blow-up*⁴ appears to be a film perfectly devised from the viewpoint of photography as evidenced already by the credits: the title appears against the background of a lawn and suddenly grows across the whole screen. The words (similarly as subsequent inscriptions) seem to be “cut out” of grass and thus the letters become the framework of the visible world. It is in the inscriptions that the multi-coloured and mobile reality appears. The letters are windows-photographs through which we look at the world. This trick, apart from the obvious process of making us aware of photographic perception, suggests that we are entering an artificially cut-out world. One of the features differentiating “natural perception” from photography is actually the frame.⁵

Susan Sontag noticed that photography embraces two extensive domains of activity, the first being the quest for truth and testifying to its existence, and the second – the creation of reality.⁶ The film protagonist acts in both areas. We make his acquaintance when he

The Predicament of the Meaning of *Blow-up*¹

leaves with his loot (i.e. film exposed to light) an earlier “undiscovered” nook of the world, a shelter for the homeless. The Photographer’s second face is fashion photography – the creation of a certain world. Upon his return from an expedition intent on “discovering the world” the Photographer starts taking pictures of a model who had been waiting for him. To the accompaniment of atmospheric music he takes a whole series of photographs with an assistant handing him successive “loaded” cameras. The Photographer approaches the model and the words he says, taken out of their context, appear to rather unambiguously indicate a love affair,⁷ although intercourse never takes place and at a certain moment he simply suspends further activity.

Describing this scene Susan Sontag emphasized (perhaps excessively so) the sexual-aggressive symbolic of the camera and the very process of taking photographs.⁸ She also indicated the distance introduced by the camera – and it is precisely this aspect of its use that I would like to stress even more. The photograph is always achieved with an intermediary (thus additionally enhancing the alienating character of the sense of sight). Direct contact with an object of interest can never take place. Presumably, intellect and a critical approach will constantly dominate over emotions. The camera can occasionally reduce the distance but never allows its elimination and direct contact. The photographer’s gaze can seek only aesthetic pleasure, while the latter is in its own way a-sensual – it can provide pleasure but never bliss.⁹ The photographer in the film says at one point: *But even with a beautiful girl... you look at them, and that’s that*, a statement that can be treated as a response to a question posed by Mikel Dufrenne about the essence of aesthetic beauty: *How can one make love to an aesthetic object?*¹⁰

In the film we come across multiple scenes introducing a certain distance, and it could be even said that the whole film is subjected to attempts at creating a distance and a relativisation of reality upon different levels, starting with such an “innocent” one as the

scene of toying with a coin. This idea was probably borrowed from Sedgwick's film *The Cameraman*, but in *Blow-up* it is granted a totally different meaning. Buster Keaton tried to use "coin tricks" in order to overcome distance and interest a woman, but the Photographer actually creates distance – the game is to demonstrate total *désintéressement* in the girls wishing to pose for him. More similar scenes can be cited.¹¹

The striking feature in the Photographer's behaviour is his dominating attitude towards the surrounding world. It is he who creates values and dictates rules. He says what is beautiful and what is ugly. *Get rid of that bag. It's diabolical* – he says to one of the girls seeking employment and she immediately hides it. When in an antique shop he notices a propeller, he buys it right away and wants to have it at home, where it lies uselessly next to a wall. It could be said that everything in his conduct is subjected to a given "moment" and that this is a truly photographic approach to reality.¹² In this context it is worth recalling yet another scene, in which the Photographer, looking for the stranger from the park, comes across a concert. One of the musicians, irritated by disturbances in the transmission of the sound, smashes his guitar against a column and hurls its particles among the excited listeners. Here too, the Photographer is the winner. Chased by crazed fans he runs into a street where he finally abandons the useless thing. One of the young people standing nearby curiously picks up a piece of the guitar, examines it and having assessed its uselessness also throws it away. The whole scene could be described as one of the shortest treatises on the semiotic nature of things.

The central episode of the plot is a scene in the park. The Photographer makes his way here seduced by the magnificent light and a quest for a fleeting aesthetic impression. He takes photographs of birds sitting on the lawn and then notices a flirting couple and follows them deep into the park. All alone against the background of plants plunged in dark light and wind. Extraordinary peace and quiet despite the wind. An ideal motif for an aesthetic photograph. The Photographer takes a number of pictures. Once the woman notices him she demands that he should stop and give her the film. The answer: *I'm a photographer* seems to explain and justify all. The status of a photographer turns him into the owner of the world he spies upon. He is a person for whom no doors are closed and no places are forbidden.¹³

Intrigued by the insistence of the woman who accosts him also in the studio the Photographer develops the film and enlarges several select pictures. An interesting analysis of this episode was presented in *Semiotics of Cinema* by Yuri Lotman. Here is a brief summary of the course of the author's reasoning. Lotman claimed that the photographs developed and hanging in the studio are excluded from the context

in which the registered scenes found themselves when we watched them "in the flesh": first – the time context, when we see the given phenomenon outside the course of events preceding and succeeding it; secondly – causal: reality seen earlier possesses a third dimension. Lotman was concerned predominantly with the Photographer *dramatis persona*: after all, the irritation of the woman was motivated and we saw how her anger was aimed at him. Now, while enlarging the photographs, the Photographer excluded everything which had transpired earlier and afterwards, and the photographs revealed a new reality: the woman in the man's embrace appears to be leaning away from him and obstinately and worriedly looking to the side, at the shrubs (it is worth adding that the "look" recorded in the photograph becomes permanently focused on the bushes). Lotman wrote that becoming aware of the fact that a certain text is incomprehensible is a necessary stage on a road towards new understanding.¹⁴

In a word, the woman – Photographer relation, which occupied our attention as we observed the scene in the park "in the flesh" becomes replaced by a relation involving the woman and the surrounding shrubbery. It is there that the Photographer starts seeking the reasons for her unrest. He enlarges successive photographs and their fragments. In doing so, he creates as if a new story, a new time-and-space narration. The woman persistently pulls her partner towards a certain spot; a successive photograph is now broken up into two frames: a close-up of the woman's face anxiously gazing towards the bushes, and the shrubs from that same frame in a blown-up version: the woman, already after her conversation with the Photographer, captured at the moment when she stopped on the spot where she had previously stood with her companion. Persistent investigation, a process of "penetrating" the photographed reality are additionally emphasized with the use of a magnifying glass with whose aid the Photographer examines the considerably enlarged copies. Someone once noticed that faced with a motionless photograph it is the mind that stirs. In this scene of reflection, "drifting" and the creation of a new story Antonioni brilliantly summarised the special relation between the viewer and the photograph. It is also, however, worth drawing attention to the difference between natural perception and photography. Perception is always intentional, but the "camera's perception" does not discriminate reality and sees everything identically (naturally, in a given set, with due concern for the focus, etc.); this is why later we can be struck by something quite different from that which we saw while looking at a certain scene.

Finally, the Photographer achieves his goal. A successive, already much enlarged frame shows – although the image is blurred due to a grainy effect – as if a contour of a face and, more clearly, in a following frame – the barrel of a gun.

The Photographer finds his discovery extremely exciting. He also wishes to share it immediately with a friend together with whom he is working on an album about London: *Ron? ... Something fantastic has happened* – he shouts on the telephone – *Those photographs in the park, fantastic! Somebody was trying to kill somebody else. I saved his life.* This sentence paradoxically confirms the opinion expressed by Barthes (or perhaps even inspired it?): *All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death.*¹⁵ We are, however, constantly willing to believe that photography saves from oblivion and death.¹⁶

The conversation is interrupted (and halted) by a doorbell. When a moment later the Photographer once again looks at the last photograph of an unidentified woman on the spot where she recently stood together with her partner he notices at her feet a blurred shape resembling a reclining body. In other words, he had not so much saved someone's life as unintentionally documented a crime, "recorded death". He now drives to the park. Night has already fallen. A man's body is really lying next to a tree. The Photographer hurriedly returns home (a scene to which I shall come back further on). Here, it turns out that the photographs have been stolen. In the plundered apartment, behind a cabinet, he discovers a single photograph as if ironically left behind and showing the outline of a reclining body, unidentifiable owing to the blow-up. After a moment, the wife of a friend-painter living nearby enters.

Photographer: I saw a man killed this morning.

Patricia: Where?

Photographer: Shot. (...)

Patricia: How did it happen?

Photographer: I don't know, I didn't see.

Patricia: You didn't see?

Photographer: No. (...) That's the body [he says, indicating the photograph].

Patricia: Looks like one of Bill's paintings.

Photographer: Yes.

Previously, Bill described one of his paintings executed in the Cubist manner: *They don't mean anything when I do them. Just a mess. Afterwards, I find something to hang on to, like that. Quite like that leg. Then it sorts itself out and adds up. It's like finding a clue in a detective story.*¹⁷ The above-cited words spoken by Patricia seem to decidedly weaken the Photographer's belief in the authenticity of the registered crime. The photograph loses its documentary assets and becomes a collection of black and white blotches resembling a painting...

Thomas decides to drive to the park to take another photograph but apparently no longer trusts photography and wants Ron to come along, as if he needed another witness and the photograph alone was no longer sufficient proof. He finds his friend at a party

and rapidly explains the necessity of taking a photograph. Ron, however, engrossed in smoking pot, says simply (as if words could serve as an alibi for his lack of interest): *I'm not a photographer.* At this point, the Photographer utters words carrying the same meaning as the earlier cited sentence in the park: *I am [a photographer],* but this time their message is totally different. They no longer resound with the unconditional assurance of a person who rules the world... Despite this declaration he does not leave the party¹⁸ and goes to the park after waking up next morning, but the corpse is no longer there.

Consider the presented relation between reality and the photograph, the assorted aspects of photography. Without undermining the ascertainment made by Lotman I would like to draw attention to a parallel and supplementary – in my opinion – interpretation of the episode from the park seen "in the flesh" and recreated upon the basis of a photograph. When the Photographer took the picture in the park he wished to render inedible his aesthetic experience. It is not surprising that he did not see what actually took place – he was preoccupied with the aesthetic side of things and not the aspect of the phenomenon (later, he tells his friend about the night: *very peaceful, very still*). At any rate, it is not true, as numerous critics of photography noticed, that the camera simply "sees better" (cf. the motto). Let us reject this conviction, which, presumably, the Photographer also initially shared. The first copies are still more on the side of "aesthetics" than of fact. Only successive blow-ups and the involvement of research intention are the reason why the photographs start to resemble photography of the fact. This shift makes it possible to discover the true version of the event occurring in the park – to notice the corpse. Next, the photographs vanish. The Photographer stubbornly looks at the only remaining one: in the unclear contour he tries to discover and capture concealed truth. Once Patricia arrives and comments on the similarity of the copy and Bill's paintings she finally destroys all attempts at seeking reality in the photograph. The latter starts to resemble a painting and its aesthetic ("created"?) aspect totally separates the sphere of the fact. When the Photographer returns to the park the corpse is no longer there. In other words, in both cases the photograph as if precedes reality – and turns into its forecast. We observe a game played by two assets of photography: it is suspended between *that has been, a été*, evidence, the truth of the past and art – to apply the distinction proposed by Barthes.¹⁹

Realists, and Barthes regarded himself as one treat photography as an emanation of past reality, as magic and not as art. *The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication*

exceeds the power of representation.²⁰ That has been – the axis around which Barthes' last book evolved – has a double reference, with greater emphasis on the truth of the past than objective truth. Barthes even maintained that by evoking the past photography has a strong connection with death. Society is incapable of tolerating this terrifying, passionate truth of photography and thus tries to tame it. One of the applied methods is transforming it into art. Here, the cinema has made a great contribution. Each art – Barthes went on – can represent the cultural symptoms of madness, but is never insane by its very nature.²¹ In the wake of Patricia's words, the realism of photography tamed by art becomes relative.

Briefly, we observe a balancing act between metonymy and metaphor. The photographs taken in the park are, first of all, a metaphor (they evoke the ambience of registered reality: the photographer mentions stillness, light and peacefulness), change into metonymy (the act of noticing the corpse) and then, in turn, became a metaphor once again (the photograph brings to mind a painting by Bill, who says: *They don't mean anything when I do them. Just a mess*). It is this alteration of the status of photography that, apparently, the world seen through the eyes of the Photographer strives for.

Are we capable today of envisaging the world without photography? In present-day culture it is difficult to imagine the world devoid of its photographic representation. As long as there is no photograph (conceived as a fact) there is no world or rather its part – after all, photography offers us the world in parts.²² The illusion claiming that the world does not exist without photography is destroyed by the film's end. The resigned Photographer returns from the crime scene – the absence of a corpse is the absence of anything which reality can offer that could be of interest to him. There arrives a jeep with young passengers – having fun, loud and dressed in carnival costumes. The car stops near a tennis court. The group splits up into spectators and players. The latter start an imaginary game, while the others stay behind the net watching an invisible ball. The faces and behaviour of the spectators reflect the faults and successes of the players. An unfortunate move by one of the players makes the imaginary ball land outside the net, near the place where the Photographer is standing. "We see" this spot, because the camera carefully follows the "ball" above the net and then the way in which it rolls along the grass. The female player makes a pleading gesture addressed to the Photographer. He seems to be stalling for a moment, as if he was wondering whether it is worth his while to take part in this tomfoolery but then slowly approaches the place where the ball should be lying, puts the camera aside, lifts the ball, throws it up and down several times and then onto the court. A close-

up of the Photographer's face shows that just as the audience did previously so now he watches the ball. In a while the sound of the ball being bounced back and forth is heard. For a moment the Photographer smiles, which could indicate comprehension, but then his face becomes still.

Consider once more the essential night time scene at the park. When the Photographer, having noticed the body in the photograph, goes to the park he actually sees a corpse and as if not trusting his own eyes is compelled to repeat the gesture made by Doubting Thomas (after all, this is also his name; apparently, Antonioni chose carefully the names of his protagonists: cf. Locke's surname in *The Passenger*²³) and touches the "wound" and the corpse. He touches the dead man's face and withdraws terrified. All around, in the darkness, wind murmurs and leaves rustle.

Only feeling the corpse makes it possible for the Photographer to smash through the "emotional windowpane" that separates him from the world. The eye, that separating sense²⁴ had been vanquished by the touch. Only this existential borderland situation allows the world to truly exist. Soon, however, the "illusion" of the world comes back. Upon his return from the park the Photographer makes his way to the studio but quickly leaves it and goes to the apartment of his friends. Seeing the couple making love he wants to go, but the woman stops him with a glance and a gesture of her head. Although this scene is not quite ambiguous it could be interpreted that while making love to her husband Patricia is actually "making love" (wants to make love) to the Photographer and establishes eye contact with him. The Photographer appears to notice this illusion and "non-literality"; in this fashion, the world returns as an illusion and fiction: nothing is as it seems. Once Thomas goes back to his own apartment the studio had been already looted. There now takes place the above-described scene of meditation over the last remaining photograph. Patricia arrives...

Can the end scene be, therefore, interpreted similarly? The one in which the Photographer – let us stress – puts the camera away and picks up – i.e. touches – the tennis ball? He starts to hear because for a moment he gets rid of the mask, he puts aside the camera behind which he was permanently concealed, and touches reality without the intermediary of the photograph. Sight, that most noble of senses according to Descartes, has been defeated by touch.

In this manner my interpretation of the film would differ from the one proposed by Yuri Lotman, who wrote: *The Photographer first looks at the empty space with disbelief but then joins the game and passes the ball. The game goes on. The amazed Photographer distinctly hears the sound of the ball against the racket. The circle of illusions closes.* In that last sentence Lotman appears to be saying that the ring of illusion closes by includ-



ing within its range also the protagonist. This is confirmed by his further words: *Just as at the beginning of the film the protagonist saw that, which did not take place so at the end he heard that, which did not take place.*²⁵ The scene too, however, could be interpreted differently. Only ostensibly does the film possess the structure of a circle and ends in the same way as it started – which could be suggested by the group of people in fancy dress closing and opening the film. That, which happened to the lead protagonist could be actually accepted as initiation, together with its three phases, with the group of people in costumes signifying a transition between extreme phases: ejection and admission.²⁶ It is, therefore, possible to maintain that the last scene is symbolic and that the protagonist passes the test the better for it although the truth he learns is bitter: photography not so much casts light on the world and brings it closer as darkens it. It does not provide certain and undeniable knowledge and it is not a measure for gaining proximity to the world or reaching the truth, but generates a distance from the world and creates (can create) a convention of seeing it. Pierre Bourdieu noticed: *In stamping photography with the patent of realism, society does nothing but confirm itself in the tautological certainty that an image of reality that conforms to its own representation of objectivity is truly objective.*²⁷ The film starts with the words

Blow-up as if cut out of grass, with the letters serving as frames through which we could look at the world. This effect was additionally enhanced by a sudden enlargement of the letters, which could suggest that photography brings us closer to the world. The words “The End” appearing on green grass as the film closes are composed of black motionless letters. Photography does not show us the world but conceals it from us. Although, as I have mentioned, this is bitter truth it nonetheless remains a form of enlightenment. Naturally, in English: *blow up* means “enlargement”, but also “explosion” or, following its visual form, “enlightenment”. The last scene can be thus connected with illumination. (Does illumination always have to be joyful knowledge?).

Once again, back to the last episode in the film. A combination of the visible (the game) and the invisible (the ball) and the ensuing synthesis – a new quality: hearing, brings to mind the symbol. One of its definitions says: *The symbol [is] for man also a sign of a connection between the visible and the invisible. It contains longing for a re-establishment of full tension – either guiltily severed or unintentionally lost – a positive attitude towards the transcendent.*²⁸

Attention to such a concurrence of the visible and the invisible, the real and the unreal, is drawn by numerous authors writing about the symbol.²⁹ If we were

to treat that closing episode as a film representation of the symbol, the symbolic nature of reality, and compare it with the earlier described episode with the guitar (known as the shortest treatise about the semiotic nature of things) then one may think that Antonioni is in favour of the symbol and the possibility of cognition and reaching reality *via* the symbol.

*

Further interpretations can be hazarded. Analysing Bayard's photograph and the text on its reverse, starting with the words: *The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard...*, Michal Sapir indicated several interesting paradoxes appearing in this confrontation. The act of reading excludes the act of seeing; recognition by the Academy, the King and the Government is associated with forgetting about the deceased: *no-one has recognized him or claimed him!* He also pointed to the paradox of suicide, in which the act of self-confirmation and the confirmation of one's will (subjectivity) is linked with the act of extreme self-negation and objectivisation (corpse). Sapir, however, omitted an important and interesting thing, namely, that "Bayard's performance" can be perceived as a prefiguration of *the death of the author* metaphor formulated by Barthes in 1968 and sometimes comprehended mistakenly and much too liberally. Barthes was concerned predominantly with stressing the authority of the work and stating that it is not the author who grants ultimate meaning to a given work but the reader: *The death of the author is the birth of the reader.*³⁰ If my reading of the "Bayard gesture" is correct then we may acknowledge that he believed that an interpretation of a photograph is always the domain of the viewer and that it is the reader-viewer who endows it with ultimate sense. In my opinion, Antonioni in *Blow-up* shared this conviction.

The black letters of the closing credits are a metaphor of the "non-transparency" of photography – severance with the unambiguity and transparency of photographs, the sort of an approach that still dominates in our comprehension of photography. If I am correct in construing *Blow-up* then we are dealing with a firm declaration that the photograph always demands an interpretation.

But can Antonioni's film be deciphered even more perversely, more "photographically", i.e. a-temporally? Is the truth of the photograph not concealed precisely "between": between transparency (of the titles opening the film) and non-transparency (of the final credits). Can the photograph (almost every photograph) not shift between the "literalness" of the image of the world (transparency) and "non-transparency", i.e. an image that requires also work on our part, or can it become the source of illumination that not only reveals earlier unnoticed reality (cf. the motto taken from Ian

Jeffrey) but also transfers the "burden of perception" onto self-reflection?

Endnotes

- 1 The original version of this article appeared in "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 2, summer 1993. This version is closer to a reprint published in my book: *Fotografia. Między dokumentem a symbolem*, Izabelin 2004.
- 2 I. Jeffrey, *Photography. A Concise History*, New York and Toronto 1981, pp. 12-13.
- 3 The photograph was taken in 1840 and shows the inventor of photography (Bayard) "fished out" of the Seine. Its reverse features a long note written by the author, explaining the reasons why he committed suicide. Cf. the excellent text by Michal Sapir, *The Impossible Photograph: Hippolyte Bayard's "Self-portrait as a Drowned Man"*, "Modern Fiction Studies", vol. 40, no. 3, fall, and S. Sikora, *Fotografia...* (I chapter).
- 4 Concentrating on the photographic aspects of *Blow-up* I shall omit certain motifs of the film that deserve our attention while analysing the film as such and which can be, obviously, interpreted upon different levels and in assorted fashions. The idea of the film comes from Julio Cortazar's *Las babas del diablo*, but it is worth remembering that certain motifs can be recognised as an artistically creative polemic with Edward Sedgwick's *The Cameraman* (1928) and that one of the film takes shows Cortazar. Naturally, the film was considered by numerous authors, also in Poland, cf. the essay by Ryszard Ciarka, *Pomiędzy pokusą a pogardą*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", no 12-13, winter-spring 1995-1996, or Andrzej Werner's *Blow-out*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", no. 6, summer 1994. It is also worth drawing attention in this context to an exciting portrait of Antonioni-the artist by Roland Barthes: *Dear Antonioni*, transl. T. Rutkowska, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", no. 6, summer 1994.
- 5 Joel Snyder recognised the frame (usually rectangular) as one of the prominent differences between natural perception and that of the camera, cf. *Picturing Vision*, in: W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Language of Images*, Chicago and London 1980; *ibid.* a detailed analysis of the differences between those two "ways of seeing".
The topic of the frame in the film is additionally stressed by the appearance of young people in carnival costumes at the beginning and end of the film; such a "distinction" can be treated as a *sui generis epoché*.
- 6 S. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 85.
- 7 *That's it. Keep it up. Lovely. Yeah, make it come. Great. No, no. Head up. Head up. Now, for me, love. For me. Now! Now! Yes! Yes! Yes!* The expressive statement additionally accentuates the erotic connotation of the words.
- 8 S. Sontag, *On Photography*, pp. 13-14. Cf. also B. Jay, *Photographer as Aggressor. When photography became a moral act*, in: D. Featherstone (ed.), *Observations. Essays on Documentary Photography*, Untitled 35. The Friends of Photography, 1984.
- 9 Paradoxically, *aisth tikós* means "things perceptible to the senses". On the distinction between pleasure and bliss cf. R. Barthes, *Krytyka i prawda*, in: *Współczesna teoria badań literackich za granicą*, ed. H. Markiewicz, vol. II, Kraków 1972.
- 10 M. Dufrenne *Utopia nowej sztuki*, in: *Zmierzch estetyki autentyczny czy rzekomy*, ed. S. Morawski, vol. I, Warszawa 1987, p. 325.

- ¹¹ Let us cite only the monologue addressed to the stranger from the park already in the studio after putting down the phone receiver (and the Photographer's behaviour preceding the monologue): *She isn't my wife really. We just have some kids. No. No kids. Not even kids. Sometimes, though, it feels as if we had kids. She isn't beautiful. She's... easy to live with. No, she isn't. That's way I don't live with her.* Soon, when the stranger starts dancing to the rhythm of the music, he tells her to slow down: *No. Keep still. Keep still. (...) Against a beat.* Only when she puffs on a cigarette taken from him extremely slowly is the Photographer satisfied. Cf. other examples in: S. Sikora's, *Fotograficzna przygoda Antonioniego: "Powiększenie"*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", no. 2, summer 1993. One could say that this ambivalence (the overcoming and creation of distance) pertains also to the camera as such.
- ¹² *A sui generis carpe diem* is, naturally, the motto of the whole depicted cultural formation, whose perfect representative is the Photographer. Cf. R. Ciarka, *Pomiędzy pokusą...*
- ¹³ The hidden camera photographs taken in the shelter and examined soon afterwards show, i.a. naked men. Nudity can in this case be deciphered as a synonym of the "naked" (unconcealed) truth shown to us by the Photographer. This aspect of nudity was pointed out by Piotr Szacki.
The photographer is the true hero of our times (or perhaps rather of that time – the 1960s) – see: the title of an essay by Arthur Goldsmith: *The Photographer as a God*, "Popular Photography" (1965), while Ryszard Ciarka in his analysis of *Blow-up*, writing about David Bailey on whom the film protagonist was modelled, cited an expression coined by George Melly: *photographer as a pop hero*. Cf. R. Ciarka, *Pomiędzy pokusą...*, p. 174.
- ¹⁴ Y. Lotman, *Semiotyka filmu*, Warszawa 1983, p. 190.
- ¹⁵ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, transl. R. Howard, London 1984, § 38.
- ¹⁶ The image of saving the world is characteristic for photography in general (as in the case of ethnography). Cf., e.g. the recurring declaration made by Zofia Rydet about perpetuation and salvage thanks to photography. Statements in the film by Andrzej Różycki: *Nieskończoność dalekich dróg. Podpatrzona i podsłuchana Zofia Rydet A.D. 1989* (Endlessly Distant Roads; Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych, Łódź 1990). A record of the sound track was published in: A. Różycki *Nieskończoność dalekich dróg. Podpatrzona i podsłuchana Zofia Rydet A.D. 1989*, "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 3-4, 1997. Cf. also S. Sikora, *Fotografia...*, chapter V.
- ¹⁷ It is worth noting that by shattering the solid Cubism stressed the necessity of taking assorted points of view into account while depicting reality.
- ¹⁸ This motif draws attention to yet another trait of the Photographer: he is incapable of, or cannot complete his undertakings. Something always seems to be in the way, making it impossible to reach the end – apart from the above-mentioned episode see: the unfinished telephone conversation with Ron, the unfinished flirtation with the stranger from the park, the "unfinished" (this time we are dealing with a sexual connotation) episode of taking photographs of the model Veruschka. In this way, the Photographer's behaviour contains not so much a discernible *sui generis* conformism, to which Lotman drew attention, as a certain impossibility of acting; Sontag accentuated that taking photographs is a form of non-activity and non-intervention: S. Sontag, *On photography*, p. 11, 42. On the other hand, it is worth noticing that activity is always a question of time, while photography – of a moment.
- ¹⁹ R. Barthes, *Camera...*, § 47, 48.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, § 36.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, § 47, 48. Naturally, one could dispute Barthes' opinion (thus understood art enters the domain of culture). It is worth, however, stressing the gravity of Barthes' experience: in the photograph we do not see an image of the past but the past as such. Emphasis placed on the ontological aspect of this experience is the reason why experiencing photography comes close to magic (a view shared by, i.a. Walter Benjamin, *Mala historia fotografii*, in: idem, *Aniol historii. Eseje, szkice, fragmenty*, selected and prep. H. Orłowski, Poznań 1996b and Edgar Morin, *Kino i wyobraźnia*, Warszawa 1975, pp. 31-55). Cf. also: S. Sikora, *Fotografia...*, chapter II.
- ²² S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin Books, p. 3, 4, 24.
- ²³ Cf. B. Sycówna *Co jest za tym oknem?*, in: Z. Benedyktowicz, D. Palczewska, T. Rutkowska (ed.), *Sztuka na wysokości oczu. Film i antropologia*, Polish Academy of Science, Institute of Art, no year or place of publication, especially pp. 100-102.
- ²⁴ Cf. S. Kracauer, *Teoria filmu. Wyzwolenie materialnej rzeczywistości*, Warszawa 1975, pp. 37-39.
- ²⁵ Y. Lotman, *Semiotyka...*, quotations from p. 196 and 197.
- ²⁶ A. van Gennep, *Obrzędy przejścia. Systematyczne studium ceremonii*, Warszawa 2006,
- ²⁷ After: R. Krauss, *A Note on Photography and the Simulacra!*, "October" 31, winter 1984, p. 57.
- ²⁸ G.H. Mohr, *Lexicon der Symbole, Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, Düsseldorf, Köln 1971, p. 10. I would like to thank Zbigniew Benedyktowicz for suggesting this definition of the symbol.
- ²⁹ Attention to this dual nature of the symbol was drawn by, e.g. Carl G. Jung – C.G. Jung, *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 326-327. Cf. also: P. Ricoeur, "Symbol daje do myślenia", in: idem, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie*, Warszawa 1985, Z. Benedyktowicz (chapter about the symbol in: *Portrety "obcego". Od stereotypu do symbolu*, Kraków 2000, pp. 81-114) and D. Czaja (*Symbol i film. Uwagi metodologiczne*, "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa", no. 3-4, 1992).
- ³⁰ R. Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, in: idem, *Image – Music – Text*, Fontana Paperbacks 1982 (first ed. 1968), p. 148. It is worth noting that in the case of Barthes the "phenomenon of the death of the author" can be linked with his division of literature into readerly and writerly, performed in *Criticism and Truth*; he treated the latter as important literature requiring an active effort on the part of the reader: *we should read as people write* (cf. R. Barthes 1972, p. 120).

Why Is It the Way It Is? Songs of Naiveté

Only birds, children and saints are of any interest.

O.W. Miłosz, Armand Godoy

Rarely does a director's debut evoke such a unanimous, even enthusiastic response from the critics as was the case with Witold Leszczyński's *Żywot Mateusza* (henceforth: *The Life of Matthew*). Soon after its premiere in 1968, the film came in for a great deal of praise, from nearly every angle possible. Reviewers would point out the director's artistic maturity and excellent film-making technique: *Leszczyński's film bespeaks full awareness of its purpose. The director does not mind going against the modern trends in the cinema. The Life of Matthew strikes one with its extraordinary formal precision and a carefully balanced composition of great purity.*¹ Others noted how different the film was from the typical offer of Polish filmmakers and cinemas: *From the point of view of cinema as a leisure activity, The Life of Matthew is an oddity, a pose, a bore – one could quote some other equally nasty epithets, too; from the point of view of cinematographic art, it is a work of notable individuality – poignant, with a lucid, expressively simple form, and an agonizingly complex content of literal and metaphorical meanings. Either way, it does not aim at popularity and – in my opinion – quite deliberately so. It is an important film, too, especially for our national cinematography, because it shows the merits of those features which the Polish film-making tradition tends to avoid: a lyrical atmosphere free from any of the fashionable complexes, a complete trust in the image and the actor, unhurried narration.*² Emphasis was being placed on the outstanding work of the director of photography: *The exquisite photography by Andrzej Kostenko is so beautiful that one can hastily invest it with symbolic functions. It fulfils its functions flawlessly.*³ Critics admired the talent and persuasive acting of the title-role performer: *One could hardly ... give too much praise to Franciszek Pieczka for his role of Matthew. So very much ... depends on the profundity of his acting. Without Pieczka, the film could not have been made.*⁴ Accolades were bestowed on the high quality of the adaptation of *Birds* by Tarjei Vesaas

for the purposes of the screenplay: *I have no intention to detract from the achievement of the Norwegian writer. However, one has to admit that the translation of his work into the language of film has been done with great consistency in The Life of Matthew. This is easy to see if one takes note of how well the film avoids artificiality in transplanting the story of a Scandinavian visionary into the setting of the Mazurian lakes in Poland.*⁵ It was hinted that we saw here a work incomparable with anything that Polish cinematography had so far produced, an exceptional artistic creation in its own right: *The Life of Matthew ..., compared with our modern productions, is unusual in more ways than one. Now that the early, silent classics of the Swedish school are a thing of the past, such films are not being made any longer. And, amidst the neurotic exhibitionism of various 'new waves', such films are not being made yet.*⁶ With so much praise, genuine enthusiasm and nearly universal admiration expressed for Leszczyński's production, one can hardly be surprised by the critic's words, which might serve as a comment on the opinions quoted above: *Whether we are to view Witold Leszczyński's film as a harbinger of some new style, theme or motif in Polish cinematography, or as an isolated phenomenon without consequences, I have no way of knowing – time only will tell. But I do know that we have a masterpiece here.*⁷

The Life of Matthew has inspired several penetrating and sympathetic critical or interpretative texts, which describe the specific language of this film, examine the nuances of the actors' performance, analyse almost every scene, and attempt to decipher its *complex content of literal and metaphorical meanings*. Their thought-provoking titles indicate possible lines and focal points of interpretation: *A Portrait with a Bird and a Stone, Thanksgiving, Birds High Above, Expulsion from Arcadia*. It would thus seem that all – or almost all – has been described, commented upon and explained in *The Life of Matthew*, that everything has already been said and one can hardly make any insightful addition to the existing body of texts. However, there is a conviction clearly emanating from some of these texts that the film resists all analytical endeavours; that it defies routine explanatory procedures; that it is at the same time simple and ingenuous but also complex and ambiguous; that it is open to a multitude of different perspectives and interpretations; that it cannot be watched solely through the scientist's magnifying glass; that it appeals to everyone of us separately, touching one's inner layer of primeval emotions. *The Life of Matthew can have multiple interpretations: its meaning unfolds between the screen and the cinema audience, not just on the screen. I am but one of the viewers and I don't want to claim that what I saw in the film is the one and only correct explanation; others may see more and see different things.*⁸

...Others may see more and see different things...
Even now, nearly thirty years later, *The Life of Matthew*

never fails to move, surprise and perplex the audience. It provokes new questions and invites new interpretations and readings. A work of art – and especially, perhaps, one that enjoys the status of a masterpiece or at least an outstanding achievement – is not a static object given once and for all. It remains constantly *in statu nascendi*, if not a challenge then at least an invitation to conversation. Meanings are not permanently attached to the original frame of reference, but evolve with it. The answers a work of art may provide depend on the questions we ask. And the latter, naturally, are in a state of flux. Bearing in mind all that has been written about *The Life of Matthew*, let us examine once more this extraordinary film and, especially, elements of its imagery: in particular, those which leave the most durable impression upon the audience.

Problems connected with the interpretation of these are twofold. For one thing, the images in question are first and foremost to be experienced, and only later do they become the subject of analysis. Interpretation, alas, always lags behind experience. It puts a premium on distance, rather than on proximity, and is inevitably impoverished in comparison with experience. The other problem is related to the existence of a kind of superfluity or semantic redundancy in the images under discussion, which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to translate into a discursive language. We are convinced about the superiority of a sympathetic eye over an analytic mind and all too painfully aware of the fact that, where images of a truly hypnotic power come into play, words can barely skim the surface of things. Therefore, our intention in writing this essay is not so much to elucidate (which in reality means: obfuscate) the images in question, as to use other, related images akin to these, in order to get at their significance. We are going to try to move away from the question of what the images say towards the question of what they are *about*, in the hope of finding out what kind of a world it is into which the viewer of *The Life of Matthew* is drawn.

Mattis

But before we invoke these images, let us ponder the question of who the main hero of the book by Vesaas and the film directed by Leszczyński really is. Who is Mattis-Matthew? This is an all-important question since it is from his perspective and through him that the audience see the world (or at least its most essential elements). The camera frequently identifies with Matthew's eyes and adopts his point of view, and even those scenes when it does not – when an “objectifying” angle is used (particularly in images of nature) – create no feeling of incompatibility, visual inconsistency or esthetic clash (even though esthetics is not the only consideration here – not even the main one). Matthew's sensitivity and his specific

perception of reality permeates nearly all the scenes of the film.

And so who is Mattis? Various answers have been given: an adult man with a child's mentality, a village fool, an inspired lowbrow, a godly simpleton, a bird of passage, a misfit, a lunatic, an idiot, a weirdo, a psychiatric case, a retarded one, a naive individual, an oversensitive character. This kind of hero, who has appeared in the history of cinema on more occasions than one, is of a venerable ancestry. Let us mention just two of his forebears, who are model, archetypal characters of the cinematographic art: Charlie and Gelsomina. Aleksander Jackiewicz brings out the difference and contrast between them when discussing the dispute between Chaplin and Fellini; he also reveals some noticeable similarities: *Gelsomina, like Charlie, loves life. When she is sad, her sadness is profound; when she is happy, it shows in her face and her movements. Joy is her constant companion. All that both these heroes need to be happy is to know that no one intends to hurt them; that the wind or anger has subsided for a moment; that the sun is shining again – and we immediately see them tidy up their rags. Charlie rubs his hands with pleasure and strikes his narrow chest; Gelsomina smoothes down her flaxen hair, winks and smiles to herself. Away from people on a wide road, the wronged Charlie recovers his spirits; his gait breaks into a joyful leap. Gelsomina, left alone in the field, smells wild flowers, stands in front of a dry tree and imitates the movement of the leafless branches with her arms – she roams the empty landscape like a playful puppy and listens in delight, her ear pressed to a telegraph pole, to the music of the wires. They are, both of them, not of this world.*⁹

And neither is Mattis. He is easily overcome by strong emotions. He rejoices – one is tempted to add: like a child – when he finally finds work planting trees, when he greets a pair of foreigners who speed through the village in their ultra-modern car, or when he has a chance to give some young girls he meets by chance on an island a boat ride to the jetty. Likewise, he fears – once again, like a child – the coming thunderstorm and hides in an outdoor privy to avoid lightning. He waits to see that *the wind ... has subsided for a moment, that the sun is shining again*. He devotes his time to, pragmatically speaking, absurd things: he gazes at the sky, carefully examines the flight of a bird above the lake, observes the trees or leaves imprints of his hands on the moss in the forest. Mattis is clearly different from his milieu. Although he remains on friendly terms with the village dwellers (after all, harmless lunatics are treated with forbearance), he is unable to participate in their daily affairs. He sees no point in earning money, in all the hustle and bustle of everyday life, which involves no emotions or imagination. He does not see why he should bother about vocational training, if the world is so beautiful, strange and fasci-

nating. He cannot understand his sister, who fails to share his excitement with the Great Bird which has appeared in their locality and flies above their house. It is all beyond his knowledge, beyond his understanding, beyond his grasp. *He is not of this world.*

We say “naiveté” and we think we have understood everything. We say “a child” and we think we have grasped everything. Everything? Have we really?

A moment's reflection may be enough to cast doubt on the received wisdom and to shatter one's common-sense convictions and certainties which otherwise would allow one to remain blissfully unaware of the need to change one's mental attitudes. Aleksander Jackowski – an expert on the work of artists who are customarily described by means of such epithets as “non-professional”, “natural born”, “different” or “naive” – attempts a closer, inside look at and a first unprejudiced, eidetic approach to the phenomenon of naiveté. His main emphasis is on the mode of its existence: *The only proof of the existence of 'the naive' is furnished by us ourselves – the audience. It is us who decide what is naive and what is mature. It is us who create pigeonholes into which we try to squeeze the hapless painters or sculptures and go to great lengths in the process to prove that they still belong in the sphere of folk art or, conversely, that they are not dependent on folk culture any more, as is the case with those whom Jean Dubuffet classifies within the category of l'art brut.* Jackowski asks further: *What is naiveté today? What associations do we form with this notion? Who seems naive to us? The way we feel it, this category embraces children and people who reject the generally accepted guidelines and do not seek success or material values. We perceive as naive certain ideals and words which seem to be in place only when uttered from the pulpit: mercy, magnanimity, humility, goodness, loftiness.* A further approximation follows, this time via negationis: *...let us try to give yet another definition of naiveté – one based on the enumeration of notions that we perceive to be its opposite. What first comes into mind includes: sobriety, maturity, sensibility, cunning, prudence, opportunism, rationality, brutality. Thus what we perceive as the absolute opposite of naiveté is those notions which are related to a 'realistic attitude towards life' and those forms of behaviour which bring measurable profits.* Then comes the conclusion: *I deliberately reduce the problem to its ethical dimension. For naiveté as an esthetical value is merely a consequence of a naive attitude – naive, which means pre-rational, intuitive, based on faith or derived from simple human impulses.*¹⁰

The essence of Jackowski's insightful comments is revealed in the very first sentence. The rest is an elaboration of this remark. We are the proof of the existence of naiveté. We decide who is to be judged naive. From a reversed perspective, we can see naiveté at an entirely different angle: not any longer through some negative value judgments, but from within – taking ac-

count of the hierarchy characteristic of this very world view. For naiveté is a certain idea of reality, a certain specific way of perceiving, construing and imposing a hierarchy on this reality. It indicates a reliance on an unprejudiced, disinterested look – a trust in intuition, rather than the calculating power of reason. Naiveté signifies an all-embracing affirmation, contrasted with scepticism and despair.

It is hardly an accident that the above discussion of the phenomenon of naiveté should mention a child. After all, people say – with supercilious condescension – that “naive” artists are like children, that they have childish minds, that their behaviour is childlike, or that their works are like a child's daubs. But this is an *ignotum per ignotus* explanation. Because the child – contrary to popular, unreflecting stereotypes – is an even greater unknown in such equations. Who is a child? I order to answer this question, one needs in the first place to get through a great many clichéd associations, labels and epithets. One is confronted with the task, not unlike a detective's work, of deconstructing our speech, our discourse on child. Linguistic detail is the really tricky part of the problem.

The initial part of Stanisław Cichowicz's philosophical discussion of the phenomenon of a child and the state of childhood is strangely reminiscent of the remarks on naiveté quoted above. The difference is that – in this context – adults are seen as the proof of the existence of a child: *The name 'infant' is given to the newborn one by those who have been in this world for quite some time and have enjoyed various privileges here. One of these is speech: the language skills which the child has yet to acquire and which provide adults with one of the keys to power over people and things. The inability to speak is so significant that it is reflected in the very name that many languages assign to the newborn one from his or her earliest day, even before baptism: the one who does not yet speak, the 'non-speaker' – infans in Latin or niemowle, patterned on the Latin form, in Polish.*¹¹

In the order established by naming or defining, the child is, above all, the one who does not speak, does not use language and is unable to communicate with its help. Thus it is from the very outset placed in a position of dependence, incompleteness and a serious imperfection (from the point of view of those who do the naming). A child is simply a not-yet-adult. Behind such a reasoning is a barely realized conviction that adulthood with all its attributes is a desired state, while childhood is merely a brief episode that leads to its attainment. Children, *if they could look at themselves through the eyes of their parents, educators and all the grown-ups, would see their lives as incidental and trifling* (infans in Latin also means 'trifling'), *in view of the importance and significance of adult life. Thus a child is a human being only to a very limited degree and needs such a long time to become one. Is it only with the twilight*

of childhood that humanity comes? Such seems to be the position of adults, even though they may openly voice different opinions...¹²

The adult controls and has power over the child. This power is based on the bulwarks of language, knowledge and reason. A daring and original utterance by a child is only noticed and appreciated to the extent that it resembles something which has been uttered by the sages before and sanctioned with the stamp of scholarship. Otherwise, reason banishes it from perception and hence from existence. In Jackowski's remarks on naiveté, the child makes its appearance so naturally as in Cichowicz's discussion of the child there emerges the notion of naiveté. To capture this observation, one could reword the oft-quoted adage by one mediocre philosopher: *We say naiveté – and we think child; we say child – and we think naiveté. The commonalty identify naiveté with an inborn spontaneity, directness, artlessness and the lack of pose, as well as frankness, simplicity and good-naturedness, but also with uncultivated minds, the lack of insight based on reason, experience and knowledge, and stupidity! Thus it is in the name of knowledge, experience and reason that one is compelled to turn a deaf ear to children's talk, as if existence without understanding, spontaneity without reflection, and decision without justification were not worthwhile... as if these were all forms of being outside one's true self.*¹³

Back to the film and our hero: if he is said to be naive, to resemble a child, or to be a "big child", this is to be understood in the light of the above discussion and the reconstruction and deconstruction of the notions of naiveté and child presented in the preceding passages. Bearing all this in mind, we might be able to arrive at a fuller and deeper understanding – free of the obvious sentimental associations – of Mattis and his strange and "abnormal" behaviour. We might also find something more than a mere lyrical confession in the words of the director himself, uttered many years after his cinematic debut: *Thank God I've retained something which may be called naiveté or a childish outlook on the world.*¹⁴

The tree

The Life of Matthew is a pagan film, and not only in the original meaning of the Latin term *paganus* (adjective: rustic, pastoral; noun: a village dweller, villager). To be sure, it is a film set in the countryside, in a rural scenery, and it does portray village people and life, while its hero is a village fool, a misfit. But it is also a pagan film in a different, more profound sense. It is pagan in the sense in which this word it is occasionally applied – without any evaluative connotations – to the world of archaic religiousness. Such a world and such forms of religious experience and perception of the sacred were reconstructed by Mircea Eliade in his work: *For a religious person, the cosmos 'lives' and 'speaks' ... Its*

*life has an additional dimension; it is not exclusively human, but also cosmic, for it is endowed with a superhuman structure. It can be called an open existence, for it is not strictly limited to the human way of living. The existence of the homo religiosus, and particularly the primitive man, opens up to the world; in his life, the religious man is never solitary: part of the world lives within him.*¹⁵

In the world of archaic religiousness, the cosmos is never mute, indifferent or opaque. It is a living reality which emanates power and energy. The physical and the spiritual are not in opposition to one another, but form a single, indivisible whole in the structure of experience. A *homo religiosus* does not face or confront reality, but is a living and inseparable part thereof.

Thus the Latin word *paganus* as used above neither denotes nor implies motifs or themes related to the European pastoral tradition; instead, it is a code word – first and foremost – for the type and mode of perceiving and experiencing reality, described by Eliade, which is religious in its essence. One of the most basic elements of such a reality, ubiquitous in the ancient perception of the world and mythical thought, is a tree.

In *The Life of Matthew*, trees feature in a number of scenes, all of which are important from the point of view of the film's dramatic structure.

In two of the scenes, Mattis is seen amidst an uncommon scenery: when he walks all alone to meet the bird and, after the death of the latter, when he comes to the clearing in the forest, accompanied by his sister (and says: *How silent it is*). In both these scenes Mattis is shown against the background of an impenetrable wall of trees in the forest. These are filmed in such a way as to emphasize their regular rhythm and vertical orientation, as if to explain *why the builders of the great Gothic cathedrals in the remote past, inspired by the pious exaltation and loftiness of the forest – immobile, though alive – picked up in their humility just three, or at most four rows containing twelve towering columns each, which followed one another in regular succession so as to support the church vault and encompass in a man-made structure the prayer of the forest.*¹⁶

The trees in *The Life of Matthew* are neither a Dantean "forest dark" (*selva oscura*) from the first tercet of *The Divine Comedy* nor a Baudelairean "forest of symbols" (*forêt des symboles* from *Correspondances*): they are simply trees – quite real and firmly rooted. And so if they are to represent some singled-out entity or symbolic reality, it is only upon the understanding of "symbol" proposed by Eliade: *...the tree becomes a religious object thanks to its power, thanks to what it reveals (and what is beyond it). But this power is, in its turn, justified by a certain ontology: the tree is invested with sacred force because it is vertical, because it grows, because it sheds leaves and grows new ones, and so it regenerates ('dies' and 'revives') an infinite number of times ... The*

tree becomes sacred ... because it reveals an extrahuman reality ... For an archaic religious consciousness, the tree is the universe, since it reflects, summarizes and thus symbolizes the latter.¹⁷

In another scene, an innocent dialogue opening foreshadows a significant – in Mattis' eyes – event:

MATTIS: *There's something more here, something called Mattis – and Olga. This is how they nicknamed our trees. How about that?*

OLGA: *I know, but where's the problem? It's just a childish joke. No need to think about it.*

Mattis walks out of the house. The thunderstorm is over. All of a sudden he sees that one of the trees has been broken and half-burnt by lightning, a singed splinter pointing skywards. For Mattis, this is a clear sign of an impending disaster. He shares his misgivings with his sister, but she fails to see the event as a bad omen. It is yet another scene in the film showing a clash between an archaic, religious mentality and a purely lay outlook on the world, free from any "superstition". The essence of this conflict is aptly characterized by Guido Ceronetti: *When a tree is made into a regular thing, an object of a utilitarian or ornamental value – then even though it used to be a dwelling of divine creatures, a locus of the supernatural, a visible imprint of deity – it can no longer be saved. Trees once used to live.*¹⁸

Mattis' eyes clearly see that trees indeed live. They have souls, they have names, they have gender, and they are born and die like humans. An analogy between a tree and man is present in many a religious and mythological tradition. It takes on different forms: *And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither (Ps 1:3); The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon (Ps 92:12);* in Greek mythology, Philemon and Baucis were transformed after their deaths into an oak and a linden with their boughs intertwined (*Metamorphoses*, VIII, 620-724); in Scandinavian mythology, Odin, Hoenir and Lodur saw two trees and transformed one of them (ash) into a man and the other (elm) into a woman. Odin gave them the soul, Hoenir understanding, and Lodur bodily form and faculties. In *The Divine Comedy*, the travellers encounter the souls of suicides transformed into trees (*Inferno*, XIII). The affinity between men and trees is captured by many proverbs and colloquial sayings: "a chip off the old block", "remove an old tree and it will wither to death", "great oaks from little acorns grow" or "as the tree, so the fruit". In his excellent ethnographic documentary *Drzewa* [Trees] (which, incidentally, has been given a motto from Eliade: *It was never the tree in itself that was an object of veneration: it was the things 'revealed' through it, contained in it and signified by it*), Andrzej Różycki explores the theme of the sacredness of trees in Polish folk religiousness.¹⁹ In one of the scenes, the following

line has been recorded: *Man is hard as an oak; woman is soft as a linden.*

Perhaps the most touching aspect of the kinship and spiritual affinity between tree and man is revealed by the scene of *The Life of Matthew* which shows in close-up a tree being cut down with a chain saw and crashing onto the ground. It brings to mind Frazer's observation that since trees have souls, they are capable of feeling and so should be felled with great care, so as to minimize their suffering.²⁰ A similar motif can be found in the Polish folk tradition: *A tree feels as much as a man does. When you cut it down, it shivers in pain.*²¹ The scene in question brings to mind another scene – one from the modern classic *Repentance* directed by Tengiz Abuladze, where a transport of logs arrives from the far-off north at the local sawmill. The logs have names of forced-labour-camp prisoners incised in them: these are "letter-trees" which the sawmill's machines will soon reduce to pulp. There is a striking contrast between the two scenes – but also a striking similarity: in both cases the tree of life becomes a tree of death.

One more scene: before sailing off in his boat for his last journey, his "one-way trip" to the lake, Mattis unexpectedly comes back on land, runs up to a birch growing next to the jetty and leaves an imprint of his teeth on the bark. A dark trickle appears on the trunk. For a long while we watch this unusual letter to the survivors – a bleeding testament. The tree is not just a mute witness of the coming death but also – by way of some *participation mystique* – partakes in it.

The bird

The Life of Matthew is a pagan film. The trees live, suffer and die like humans. Nature "talks", feels, breathes. Mattis – seen not just as a child and a madman, but as a genuine *homo religiosus* – is a living part of nature. No other scenes reveal the nature of his close, even intimate relationship with Nature more tellingly than those with the bird.

The day is drawing to an end. It is getting dark. Mattis sits in front of the house with his sister, helping her in her chores. From time to time he looks at the sky. After a while he walks to the back of the house, descends to the jetty, turns round a couple of times, his eyes fixed on the sky, as if in search of something. Suddenly, he jumps into the boat, gives a few pulls on the oars and steers towards the centre of the lake. High above soars the Great Bird – quietly, slowly, majestically. The dark black shape stands out against the sky. A captivating, hypnotic image which does not make one think as much as it "makes one feel", playing upon the subtlest emotions. Behind the concrete form of this image, accessible to the senses, one can discern an archetype, a "proto-image", a primeval symbolic structure.

What is the source of the appeal of an image which – thanks to some of its immediate features and by way of some amazing abstraction mechanism – is possessed of a primeval beauty?

In its most essential part, this appeal has nothing to do with an accumulation of various charms. It is only at a subsequent stage that enchantment can be broken down into component parts, but at the very moment an individual experiences the surprise of enchantment, he or she cares nothing about the world and concentrates instead on this unique, rapid flash.

But generalities aside, let us concentrate on the problem within the precisely delimited domain of the poetics of flight. I contend that it is not because of their magnificent colours that birds so stimulate our imagination. What is beautiful in a bird is above all its flight. For a dynamic imagination, flight signifies primeval beauty. The beauty of the plumage is perceived only when the bird alights on the ground, that is, when it has ceased to be the bird that we see in our dreams. One can assume that there exists a dialectics of imagination which separates flight from colour, and movement from an outer appeal. It is impossible to have everything at the same time: one is either a lark or a peacock. The peacock is a par excellence earthly creature, a kind of a mineralogical museum. To push the paradox to the extreme, one should note that in the sphere of imagination, flight must create a colour of its own. We realize then that the bird proper to our imagination, the bird that flies in our dreams and in genuine poetry, cannot be a multi-coloured bird. Usually it is either blue or black and either ascends or descends.²²

Bachelard's phenomenology of flight in poetic imagination – in the works of various poets (and who was it that compared poetic imagination to a child's sensitivity? who said that poets are like grown-up children?) – is developed, complemented and enriched with new clusters of meanings by another one of the Great Naive, an artist who made the following statements in his works: *When we are no longer children, we are already dead...*; and *All my life I've been looking for one thing, the essence of flight*.²³ It was the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi. In 1912, Brancusi embarked on a project which took more than twenty years to complete: the "Birds" cycle. Initially, he adopted as a starting point the Romanian folk motif of *Paserea Măiastra* – the Magic Bird. It is a fabulous bird which, when captured or wounded, returns to its original form and turns into a fairy. In the early works from this cycle, Brancusi endeavoured to stress the dual nature of the bird and emphasize its feminine element. In time, however, his attention turned towards the mystery of bird flight, hence his first *Birds in Space*. The symbolic, mythological and religious contexts of Brancusi's work inspired the following comments from his fellow countryman, Mircea Eliade: [Brancusi] *did not have to read books to discover that flight is the equivalent of happiness,*

*because it symbolizes ascent, transcendence, taking leave of the human condition. Flight indicates that the burden has been shed, that an ontological change has taken place in human life. All over the world one encounters myths, fables and legends about heroes and wizards who commute freely between heaven and earth. A whole cluster of symbols related to spiritual existence and, above all, spiritual experience and the spiritual faculties of the mind is based on the images of birds, wings and flight. The symbolism of flight signifies an escape from the realm of everyday experience and the dual character of this escape is obvious: it comprises both transcendence and freedom, both achieved through flight.*²⁴

Let us invoke yet another image, equally moving as the previously mentioned one: Mattis' encounter with the bird on a clearing in the forest. The bird freezes for a moment; so does Mattis. They face each other for a moment. There is more to it than a mere exchange of stares: it is a kind of spiritual affinity expressed in the meeting of something (somebody?) quite different and yet very close, dissimilar and yet in some inexplicable way similar. An epiphany!

No comment on this scene can capture the problem more aptly than the words of Blaise Cendrars: *As for myself, the thing that most puzzles me in these birds is their eyes: not of this world and not even of the afterworld, for where is the cemetery for birds? Have you ever experienced the fascination with that impersonal look – I would even say: the look of eternity – which the Bird not so much directs at us as pierces us with as if we were transparent; the look which aims beyond us – directly at our souls or our shadows – while the Bird is cooing, ready for the wedding ceremony, ready to fly away to immortality with our alter ego or else to peck and devour the eyes of your guardian angel? No one in this world is so much a stranger as a bird is, for where is the cemetery, the morgue for birds?*²⁵

You and me, whispers Mattis, me and you. So different, both of them: not of this world.

What is it in the bird that so fascinates Mattis? Let us seek an answer from another "naive one" – a poet in whose work birds have always, from the very outset, occupied a prominent position. In his poems *shrieking pelicans and cranes wade at night / and the sky has been rent by the empty disputes of lapwings* ("Birds"); *Plump grouse high in flight / Veil the sky above the forest with their wings* ("Bird Kingdom"); *The moon waxes and wanes, while the shriek of the night birds remains the same* ("Three Choruses from Hiroshima, an Unwritten Drama"); *When the magnolia tree is in blossom ... / I can hear you sing on the bank of the Potomac* ("On the Bird Singing on the Bank of the Potomac"); *It was a summer of column-like plane-trees and showers of bird pearls from daybreak on* ("On the Spirit of the Laws"); *A magpie screeched and I said: 'Magpieness' / What is magpieness?* ("Magpieness"); *beneath the rubble / of basalt rock, flocks of birds dive in the transparent waters of*

the bay ("A Dithyramb"); humming birds paused above the honeysuckle plants ("The Gift"); Your sojourn here is brief / Likely it's at dawn, if the sky is clear, / In the melody repeated by the bird ("On Angels"); We won't be deterred by the scenery or by the kingfisher stitching together the two banks with the luminous ribbon of its flight ("Diary of a Naturalist").

Why is it possible to fall in love with birds? Because they are mysterious, wrote Miłosz in 1958²⁶ – a thought he was to develop a year later in his *Ode to a Bird*, reminiscent of Cendrars:

O the complex one. / O the unaware one. / Feathery hands clasped on your back. / Resting on grey-lizard feet, / On cybernetic gloves / That stick to whatever they touch.

O the incommensurable one. / O the one greater than / The flowery precipice, the eye of an earwig in the grass / Red with the revolutions of green-and-violet suns, / Greater than the night in the galleries of a twin-lighted ant / And the galaxy in its body / Indeed, equal to any other.

Outside will, without will / You swing on the twig above the lakes of air / With drowned palaces, towers of leaves, / Landing terraces within the lyre of shadow. / You stoop when summoned, and I muse upon the moment / When foot lets go, arm extends. / The place you were sways; you follow crystal lines / Carrying your warm and beating heart away.

O the one unlike anything, indifferent / To the sound of pta, pteron, fvgls, brd. / Outside name, without name, / Immaculate movement in a huge amber lump. / So that I could grasp in the beating of the wings what separates me / From the things I give names to day by day / And from my vertical form / Though it extends itself all the way to the zenith.

But your half-open beak is always with me, / Its interior so bodily and amorous / That the hair on my neck stands on end and shivers / With kinship and your ecstasy. / Then I wait in the hallway in the afternoon, / I can see the mouth next to the brass lions / And I touch the bared hand / Beneath the fragrance of the fountain and the bells.²⁷

Miłosz's words bring us to the last scene where the bird appears in the film. This is an image which renders all the analytical instruments awkward and useless, and needs no interpretation whatsoever – an image which overwhelms the audience with its cruel beauty and austere dignity: the bird, shot by a hunter, dies in Mattis' arms, its eyelid slowly dropping. What is there to be said at this point? What else can one comment upon or analyze? Perhaps all we are left with is two terse sentences from Cendrars, which somehow seem relevant to this non-human (and yet how very human!) death: *A bird's eye. How devilishly penetrating it is.*²⁸

And let us repeat after Miłosz:

O the complex one...

O the unaware one...

O the incommensurable one...

Outside will, without will...

Outside name, without name...

O the one unlike anything, indifferent...

Let this litany of apostrophes be read like the first lines of a dirge, like an unfinished mourning lament.

The world. Songs of *naiveté*

The Life of Matthew is a pagan film. As we have seen, many of its scenes could serve to illustrate the points made by Eliade in his magnum opus. Even the titles of the particular parts of the film – "Home", "Village", "Bird", "Isle", "Lake", "Tree" and "Stone" – correspond (most of them) to the titles of subchapters in the *Patterns in the History of Religion*. The world shown by Leszczyński is composed of the simplest elements, as the whole film is about a primeval, essential, fundamental reality. But, of course, it is not a nature film. And, try as hard as you may, it could not be made into a manifesto of the ecological movement. It is free from nostalgia for the pristine state of innocence and sinlessness; nor does it display a sentimentality or mawkishness characteristic of those works which – consciously or inadvertently – draw on the Rousseau tradition. In *The Life of Matthew*, there is no crying over spilt milk, no longing for a lost Arcadia. Or, if such a feeling is expressed, it is for an Arcadia where there is a tombstone with an inscription: *Et in Arcadia ego*.²⁹ For an Arcadia where there is a tombstone with the Great Bird buried underneath. For an Arcadia where there is death.

How, then, are we to look upon *The Life of Matthew*, if it is neither a reminiscence of Rousseau nor an ecological statement? Where does it come from, the immense power of that film with a simple plot and few dramatic twists – a film in which, except for some rare moments, hardly anything happens?

The first clou is provided by the cinematographic composition. Leszczyński, following Carl Theodore Dreyer's maxim: *I am not interested in an image of reality but in a reality of images*, constructs his images in a special way. He prefers a static, immobile picture. A picture in which time freezes. An image that celebrates permanence. Images in his film are constructed with great care, asceticism and solemnity. It is hardly a coincidence that the vocabulary used to describe these images draws on religious language. For *The Life of Matthew* is a religious film. Not on the confessional interpretation of this term, but in the sense of the previously described mode of perceiving and experiencing reality, revealing its multidimensional, profound character. Clearly, the traditional, archaic distinction between content and form in an artistic work does not make any sense in this case. Form is not something added to the transmitted "content". It simply is content. This is best illustrated by the function of the musical track envisaged by Leszczyński.³⁰ Particular fragments of Core-

lli's *Concerto Grosso in G Minor, No. 8, Opus 6 (Fatto per la Notte di Natale)* provide more than a mere illustration of what is happening on the screen: they merge with the image into a unified whole, a kind of a "sound-image". The slow, majestic *Grave* entirely blends and harmonizes perfectly with the image – the bird soaring above the lake shown in slow-motion. The music is not an illustration, but one of the constitutive elements of the image. The camera seeks after the hierophanic dimension of reality. It brings out these attributes and features which are absent from a "realistic" look:

Objects, situations, 'facts' or 'affairs' in their everyday dimension and in their colloquial meaning assigned to them by way of a universal consensus are in no way mysterious. In fact, they are the opposite of mystery: they add up to a reality which is secure and protects one from all kinds of surprise or ambiguity.

This is how a 'realist' construes the word ... There exists, however, a different meaning of reality, hidden behind the one that is generally accepted ..., behind the polyvalent character of all affairs, things and situations. Reality seen from the point of view of this other meaning becomes holy, which is to say, terrifying...

And yet it is this very meaning that realists should take into account if they are to treat life seriously. There is no justification for restricting oneself to the everyday value of affairs and things: affairs and things have their specificity, their beauty, their ugliness, their sensibility and nonsensicalness, their order and disorder – they exist all together and at the same time each of them separately.

When, finally, one gets at the multiplicity of sense and nonsense in the same things, one is faced with their sanctity. More precisely, one is faced with what the Greeks invested, ultimately, with the attributes and appearance of a deity or a demon. One is faced with the unknown.³¹

The Life of Matthew is also a metaphysical film – in the same way as, according to the poet whom we have quoted so often in the preceding paragraphs, *Pan Tadeusz* (Poland's best-known and best-loved Romantic epic) is a deeply metaphysical poem, that is, its subject matter is the order of being – so rarely perceived in our daily lives – which is an image (or a reflection) of pure Existence.³²

A similar, primordial order of being was constructed by Miłosz (who, to some extent, defied the reality of the times) in his wartime poem *The World*, with an archaic-sounding subtitle of *Songs of Naïveté*. The adopted perspective of a child was a conscious stylization. The speaker sees the world through a child's eyes: the poem abounds with diminutives, naive descriptions and unbiased looks; reality is made to accommodate a child's sensitivity. However, this complex, deceptive and deeply self-ironic poem expresses clearly and unquestioningly the conviction typical of children and poets: that the world exists – that the senses do not deceive us. And, perhaps, something more: existence has, apart from its concrete dimension, also a transcen-



dental dimension, accessible to those who renounce the claims for domination and possession and embrace instead an attitude of sympathy.

The world – the rural microcosm – presented in *The Life of Matthew* is founded on the concrete: there is the forest, lake, grass, field, river, stone, sky, bird... But each of these beings is part of a larger, transcendent Whole. And it is, in this context, of secondary importance only that the reality of *The World* is based on the Christian *Summa theologiae*, and the reality of *The Life of Matthew* – on a fully developed "pagan" perception of the sacred. A similar image, seen through the eyes of Mattis, appears in the film twice: in the foreground, a cart brings the harvest in, a cow grazes, someone works in the field, a boat sails down the river, a horse-drawn cart fords the stream; in the background, one can see the silhouettes of cottages, trees, the fabric of the sky above... Nothing out of the ordinary – a pastoral image of the rustic life or, perhaps, a genre scene inspired by Dutch painting (Leszczyński mentions Breughel in this context). But there is more than that to this banal picture: peace, order, necessity and obviousness. Everything is where it belongs. Everything is the way it should be. A vivid, fully meaningful world. This is an image derived from some primary acceptance and affirmation of the world, which engender the belief that every entity found in the world makes its contribution to the reality that transcends it.

The question

In Mattis, the childish enchantment with the world and the multiplicity and variability of visible forms is

inseparable from the power of poetic imagination. He is also capable of astonishment – in a philosophical spirit. When talking to the housewife, Mattis unexpectedly asks a question. He receives no answer and does not attempt to seek one on his own. It is the question of questions: “Why is it the way it is?” As a critic suggests, this question is rooted in literary tradition and is reminiscent of the questions and doubts harboured by Chekhovian heroes.³³ But a perhaps simpler and more natural interpretation points at philosophical tradition and philosophy in general, with its propensity for an incessant astonishment (*thaumadzein*) at the world and for naive, childish questions which challenge the obviousness of whatever there is. It reminds one of a slightly different yet likewise fundamental question, asked by Martin Heidegger – the last of the Great Naive to be quoted here – in his famous lecture entitled *What Is Metaphysics?* The question which concluded the lecture was: *Why is there anything at all, and not just nothing?*

Why is it the way it is?

Why is there anything at all, and not just nothing?

Precisely, why?

Translated by **Krzysztof Kwaśniewicz**

Endnotes

- ¹ J. Fuksiewicz, *Żywoć człowieka* [The life of man], “Kultura” 1968, no. 8.
- ² L. Pijanowski, *Portret z ptakiem i kamieniem* [A portrait with a bird and a stone], “Kino” 1968, no. 2.
- ³ J. Płażewski, *Dziękczynienie* [Thanksgiving], “Ekran” 1968, no. 8; L. Pijanowski, *op. cit.*
- ⁴ S. Grzelecki, *Ptaki nad głową* [Birds high above], “Życie Warszawy” 1968, no. 44; L. Pijanowski, *op. cit.*
- ⁵ J. Płażewski, *op. cit.*
- ⁶ L. Pijanowski, *op. cit.*
- ⁷ K. Eberhardt, *Wygnanie z Arkadii* [Expulsion from Arcadia], “Film” 1968, no. 7. Of course there were reviews critical of the film, too: it was censured for its artificial and abstract qualities (A. Jackiewicz) or poor acting in episodes. Leszczyński himself considered the part of the film entitled “Isle” a failure.
- ⁸ L. Pijanowski, *op. cit.*
- ⁹ A. Jackiewicz, *Moja filmoteka. Kino na świecie* [My film archives: Cinema in the world], Warszawa 1983, p. 29.
- ¹⁰ A. Jackowski, *Sztuka naiwnych* [The art of the naive], “Polska Sztuka Ludowa” 1982, no. 1-4, pp. 13-14.
- ¹¹ S. Cichowicz, ‘*Postscriptum*’ do I i II *dekonstrukcji ‘avant la lettre’* [A postscript to the first and second ‘avant la lettre’ deconstruction], in: *Moje ucho a księżyc. Dywagacje, diagnozy* [My ear and the moon: Digressions, diagnoses], Gdańsk 1996, p. 121.
- ¹² *Ibidem*, p. 122.
- ¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 123.
- ¹⁴ *Ku życiu i ku śmierci. Rozmowa z reżyserem Witoldem Leszczyńskim* [Towards life and towards death: An interview with Director Witold Leszczyński], “Film” 1986, no. 39.
- ¹⁵ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York 1959, pp. 166-167.
- ¹⁶ S. Vincenz, *Na wysokiej poloninie. Zwada* [On the meadow high: Conflict], Warszawa 1981, p. 90.
- ¹⁷ M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii* [published in English as *Patterns in the History of Religion*], transl. by J. Wierusz-Kowalski, Warszawa 1966, pp. 265-266.
- ¹⁸ G. Ceronetti, *Drzewa bez bogów* [Trees without gods], transl. by S. Kasprzysiak, Kraków 1995, p. 29.
- ¹⁹ Różycki’s film is a fascinating testimony to the interpenetration and coalescence of archaic, folk religiousness and Christian structures. It reveals behind the Christianized beliefs about holy trees the presence of a persistent – one would even say “ineradicable” – “pagan” stratum.
- ²⁰ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (reference based on the Polish translation by H. Krzeczkowski: *Złota gałąź*, Warszawa 1978, p. 122).
- ²¹ W. Siarkowski, *Materyały do etnografii ludu polskiego z okolic Pińczowa* [Source materials on the ethnography of the Pińczów region in Poland], *Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej*, vol. IX, 1885, p. 44; Siarkowski’s materials were invoked by Moszyński, who noted that in Poland and Belarus, cutting down certain kinds of trees was not allowed, “as they would bleed”: K. Moszyński, *Kultura ludowa Słowian* [Folk culture of the Slavs], Warszawa 1967, vol. II, part 1, p. 524; cf. also: G. van der Leeuw, *Fenomenologia religii* [Phenomenology of Religion], transl. by J. Prokopiuk, Warszawa 1978, pp. 92-94; M. Lurker, *Przesłanie symboli* [The meaning of symbols], transl. by R. Wojnakowski, Kraków 1994, pp. 222-224.
- ²² G. Bachelard, *Poetyka skrzydeł* [The poetics of the wings], transl. by A. Tatarkiewicz, in: *Wyobrażenia poetycka. Wybór pism* [Poetic imagination: Selected texts], selected by H. Chudek, with an introduction by J. Błoński, Warszawa 1975, pp. 182-183.
- ²³ The first sentence quoted after: E. Shanes, *Brancusi*, New York 1989, p. 107; the second – after: *Brancusi i mitologia* [Brancusi and mythology], transl. by D. Czaja, *Polska Sztuka Ludowa*, 1988, no. 3, p. 182.
- ²⁴ M. Eliade, *Brancusi...*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.
- ²⁵ B. Cendrars, *Gwiezdna wieża Eiffla* [A starry Eiffel Tower], transl. by J. Rogoziński, Warszawa 1971, p. 21.
- ²⁶ Cz. Miłosz, *Kontynenty* [The continents], Paryż 1958.
- ²⁷ Cz. Miłosz, *Oda do ptaka* [Ode to a bird], in: *Wiersze* [Poems], Kraków – Wrocław 1984.
- ²⁸ B. Cendrars, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
- ²⁹ The vanitative sense of this inscription has been discovered by E. Panofsky, *Et in Arcadia ego. Poussin i tradycja elegijna* [Et in Arcadia ego: Poussin and the tradition of the elegy], in: *Studia z historii sztuki* [Studies in art history], Warszawa 1971, pp. 324-342.
- ³⁰ For information about the use of Corelli’s music, see an extensive study by the director himself: W. Leszczyński, *Muzyka w filmie Żywoć Mateusza* [Music in *The Life of Matthew*], “Kino” 1968, no. 2, pp. 25-28.
- ³¹ N. Chiaromonte, *Co pozostaje?* [What is left], transl. by S. Kasprzysiak, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, 1995, no. 37, p. 8. (The text comprises fragments from the collection: *Che cosa rimane. Taccuini 1955-1971*, Bologna 1995.)
- ³² Cz. Miłosz, *Ziemia Ulro* [The land of Ulro], Warszawa 1982, p. 133.
- ³³ R. Marszałek, *Film fabularny* [Feature films], in: *Historia filmu polskiego, 1968-1972* [The history of the Polish cinematography: 1968-1972], vol. IV, Warszawa 1994, p. 122.

Amidst the countless “images in a film”, which in some way problematise the “film image”, special place belongs to the famous sequence of a photographic reconstruction of events in Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* (1966). In my brief analysis I attempt to draw attention to the part played in this construction by the most “visual” among the narratological categories, namely, “focalisation”.

*

The narratological conception of focalisation was introduced at the beginning of the 1970s by Gérard Genette, who with its assistance tried to differentiate the narrative “voice” in the literary story (question: who is speaking?) from the “gaze” (question: who is looking?).¹

Since these two activities do not mutually exclude each other it is easy to succumb to a misunderstanding typical for earlier, pre-structuralistic studies on the theory of literature, which since the 1940s have been dealing with the “point of view” in narration. Both questions were applied basically interchangeably (which could be actually recognised as a continuation of a modern illusion consisting of identifying the gaze, the seeing eye, with consciousness and subjectivity). Meanwhile, although one not only looks but also speaks from a certain point of view it is possible to accept the point of view of someone else.

In the interpretation proposed by Genette focalisation is a special aspect of narration, a rhetorical technique, a type of stylisation consisting of presenting the recounted story in a manner defined by the perspective of one of the characters. According to this conception (naturally, bypassing many of its nuances) narration could be:

1. non-focalised (focalisation at level “zero” – the narrator tells the reader more than the character in the given scene knows);
2. inner focalised (in the extreme form – the narrator knows only as much as the character);
3. outer focalised (an impassionate observation of another character in the manner of a camera, without penetrating his innermost recesses and without demonstrating his motives of activity, feelings, experiences or thoughts).

In the second half of the 1970s Genette’s conception of focalisation was developed and, at the same time, radically altered by Mieke Bal, author of classical works from this domain² who noticed:

First, Genette’s three-point classification was based on two incompatible criteria: the difference between the first and second point is defined by the position of the onlooker (the subject of focalisation), while that between the second and third – by the object of focalisation. The “externality” discussed in point three does not, therefore, pertain to the focalising instance,

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the “observer”, but to the focalised “observed” object, which only reminds that focalisation is a *r e l a t i o n*.

Second, focalisation is *n o t* narration (understood as narrower than verbal activity) nor its special aspect or technique even when narration attempts to express in words precisely what the narrator sees. Focalisation is a consistently non-verbal activity – a relation between the subject and the object of perception (although not necessarily visual). The narration process (narration in a wider meaning of the term), therefore, involves two supplementing procedures: verbal (narration) and non-verbal (focalisation).

This is the reason, Bal maintains, why there is no such thing as neutral unfocalised narration. If a narrator in a narrative work accepts the viewpoint of one of the characters of the diegesis then we may speak about *i n n e r* focalisation or *i n t r a*-diegetic focalisation (sometimes, the function of the *i n t r a*-diegetic focaliser is assumed successively by two or several different characters). What happens, however, when the story is not focused on any of the characters of the diegesis? According to Genette we are then dealing with zero level focalisation; Bal maintains that total absence of inner focalisation signifies only that narration is focalised *e x t e r n a l l y*, *e x t r a*-diegetically (naturally, this situation should not be confused with the earlier mentioned “inner focalisation” conceived by Genette). Supposed *focalisation degree zéro* does not, therefore, designate some sort of a fundamental, absolute, neutral level of narration, which in certain circumstances will be subjected to stylisation modification (focalisation), but itself is a certain formula whose characteristic feature is the *c o n c e a l m e n t* of the presence of the subject of focalisation in formal construction. The *e x t r a*-diegetic focaliser in the literary text is the *e x t r a*-diegetic narrator, but this “personal” identity (*focalisateur-narrateur*) does not denote “functional” identity. At the same time, it is of no importance whether we deal with narration conducted in the third person (the so-called third-person centre of awareness) or in the first person (restrospective nar-

ration) since that difference concerns the identity of the narrator and not the focaliser.

The consequences of the changes proposed by Mieke Bal – sometimes mistakenly treated as a mere correction of the Genette conception – are extremely serious, since they essentially alter the comprehension of the general process of transforming the *fabula* into a text, i.e. its discoursivisation. Recall, while simplifying things considerably, that in the entire history of narration, starting with Aristotle's *Poetics* and, in times closer to us, with the Russian formalists there are two fundamental levels distinguished in the general structure of narration:

- the order of the recounted events (Aristotle's *praxis-pragmata*, *fabula*, *histoire*, story, diegesis...);
- the order of the exposition of those events, i.e. the text (Aristotle's *mythos*, *syuzhet*, *discourse*, *récit*, plot...).

Gérard Genette basically accepted this two-level construction, although he included into it "narration" understood as *a c t i v i t y* (real or functional), *a p r o c e s s* transforming the *fabula* and producing the text. This model can be presented as follows:

NARRATIVE TEXT – [narration] – *FABULA*
signifiant *signifié*

Mieke Bal complicated things by introducing yet another procedure of the transformation of the *fabula* (yet another *operation*) alongside narration, namely, "focalisation". In this manner, the whole process takes place in two stages (narration, focalisation) and at three successively arranged levels (text, story, *fabula*).³ This structure could be presented as follows:

A) NARRATIVE TEXT – [narration] – STORY
signifiant *signifié*

B) STORY – [focalisation] – *FABULA*
signifiant *signifié*

In the interpretation proposed by Mieke Bal:

A) THE TEXT is a narrativised story (French: *récit*). In other words, the story is concretised in the text produced by the narrator (as words and signs). The text is *signifiant* and its *signifié* is the story. The same story can be narrativised in assorted ways by creating different texts; take the example of Kafka's *The Castle*, originally written in the first person and then in the third one – these are two different texts, the effect of the narrativisation of the same story.

B) STORY (*récit*) is *f o c a l i s e d fabula*. To put it differently, the *fabula* is presented in a specific perspective (aspect). A series of modifications referring to the time, selection and distribution of information changes the *fabula* into a story. The story is the *signifi-*

ant and the *fabula* is its *signifié*. The same *fabula* can be focalised differently by creating various "stories"; take the example of Hamlet's story according to Shakespeare (*The Tragedie of Hamlet*) and Tom Stoppard (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*).

(At this point, attention should be drawn to a certain terminological inconvenience associated with triple stratification: the French *récit* as a rule corresponds to that, which the formalists described as *syuzhet*, and the English *story* – to the *fabula*. In works by Mieke Bal both those terms denote the same distinguished category, which I translate not without hesitation into the Polish as *opowiadanie* (story). Since the heart of the matter concerns the effects of an activity that is not verbal but rather "visual" or "sensual" – in other words, focalisation – one should rather speak about "interpretation", "vision" or "aspect". This is the way the question was presented by Bal, who wrote, e.g.: *We are confronted with a vision of the fabula*, and gave the appropriate chapter in her textbook the title: *Story: Aspects*.

The concept of focalisation, understood as an activity creating the *story*, thus serves something more than only an attempt at formalising those particular narrative situations in which one accepts the "point of view" of one of the characters. Actually, reformulation affects all the principles of the activity of the whole "narration apparatus", since in addition it involves distinguishing the *d y n a m i c* aspect, not always visible in purely formalistic interpretations. The need to distinguish this aspect could be perceived in studies by many other theoreticians of literature. Already at the end of the 1960s Barthes abandoned the concept of the "structure" and replaced it with processual "structurisation" (in addition, performed by the reader). A similar understanding could be applied to the proposal made by Genette, i.e. to add to *histoire récit* also *narration* envisaged as a category dramatising the "process of producing a text". First and foremost, however, I would like to compare (a somewhat hazardous task) Mieke Bal's "focalisation" to the category of the "plot" in the meaning given to it by Peter Brooks in his *Reading for the Plot*.⁴

(How do we translate the English *plot* into the Polish? In this narratological context there is naturally no other solution than as: *intryga*, even if only because in the English-language versions of Paul Ricoeur's books analysing Aristotle's *Poetics* and its key category of *mythos* – works, which Brooks treats very seriously – the French *l'intrigue* is translated as *plot*.⁵ The Polish reader, however, will not instantly discover in *intryga* its source (Latin: *intricare*: to tangle, to complicate) so well rendered by the almost-homonym of the English noun, namely: *splot* (weave). Pity that this word has not been subjected by the theory of literature lexicalisation as was the thematically related, and also bor-

rowed from the technique of weaving, *wątek* (thread, motif), which preserved the complicated spatiality of weave to which the theory of literature, however, granted a different meaning).

Peter Brooks wrote:

"Plot" in fact seems to me to cut across the *fabula* / *syuzhet* distinction in that to speak of plot is to consider both story elements and their ordering. Plot could be thought of as the interpretative activity elicited by the distinction between *syuzhet* and *fabula*, the way we use the one against the other.⁶

The *plot*, therefore, according to Brooks, is yet another element of the typology accepted in poetics that could be added (alongside the two already recognised ones: *syuzhet* and *fabula*) to the formalised model of narration; it is not one of the elements but the weave linking them – it is the *dynamic, shaping force of the narrative discourse, the active process of the syuzhet working on the fabula, the dynamic of its interpretative ordering*. Undoubtedly, the *plot* fulfils a function that renders it similar to the *récit* (story) as seen by Mieke Bal. Let us add for the sake of clarity: this is the case even if the "story" produced in the process of focalisation has been added by the Dutch researcher to the model as its third element. It is worth remembering that no narratological conceptualisation describes objective reality but only attempts to create a language of analysis as productive as possible. Even Bal accentuated that narratology is solely *a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty*.

What does the difference between Brooks' *plot* and Bal's *story* consist of? Brooks placed much more emphasis on the temporal aspect of the narrative dynamic: his *plot* is a process of weaving events into a chain of sequences (as *mise en intrigue, emplotment*, Ricoeur's conception of "narrative time"). He wrote:

Plot as a logic of narrative would hence seem to be analogous to the syntax of meanings that are temporally unfolded and recovered, meanings that cannot be otherwise created or understood (p. 21). (...) *a structuring operation peculiar to those messages that are developed through temporal succession* (p. 10).

This pertains also to the time occupied by reading: radicalising the paradox formulated by Genette, namely, that although a book is a spatial object it is realised as a sequence and a succession, Brooks (in accordance with *reading for the plot* the titular activity is typical rather for naive reading than for its conscious counterpart) stressed the significance of the force that "draws" the reader into the course of the story from its beginning to end and inclines him to turn the page and *read on*; this force is a form of desire. He admitted that here he differs from Barthes; among the five codes set into motion while reading, and which Bar-



thes enumerated in S/Z, Brooks regards two as most prominent: pro-airctic and hermeneutic, i.e. those that must be decoded successively and are "irreversible"; Brooks also maintains that their combination is the *plot*. Meanwhile, we know that Barthes attached greatest importance to the special simultaneous nature of the literary work, the possibility of "rereading".⁷

Accepting the course of reasoning proposed by Mieke Bal one must also recognise that the logic of narration (and reading) is not exclusively the logic of a sequence of events. Apart from the horizontal temporality of the plot one should also take into account the as if vertical aspect, the mechanism of *embedding* hierarchically organised narration instances: the narrator, the focaliser and the actor.⁸ In a thus modelled narration apparatus the sequence of events at the level of the "story" is the responsibility of focalisation. Since it is defined as the relation between the subject and the object of perception, the object of literary reading in a certain manner assumes a concrete shape and receives *sui generis* spatiality and massiveness, which render the process of reading a quasi-visual operation. Presumably, this is precisely the reason why the Dutch scholar expanded the domain of her studies by including the visual arts and endowing narratology with a trans-media character. Interestingly, just as experience gained in work on literary texts made it possible for Bal to analyse the canvases of Rembrandt or Caravaggio so painting enabled her later to return, together with her conceptual instruments, to Proust.⁹ Just as the "narratological" reading of a painting (a medium that is com-

monly considered to be synchronic “due to its nature”) has a somewhat diachronic character (by no means as a temporal order of the *fabula* of the representation but upon the level of reception) so the literary work, focalised (and not only narrativised), assumes the features of relative synchronicity.

Recall a narratological obvious fact, namely, that even if the *fabula* produces an impression of “what really happened” and what is subsequently demonstrated in the text (literary, film, painterly) this is merely the effect of “mimetic illusion”; actually, the only real concept at the disposal of the reader/spectator is the text/image, while the *fabula*, according to Bal, is merely *a memorial trace that remains with the reader after completion of the reading*.¹⁰ It must be added, however, that this reconstruction performed by the reader (“interpretation”) is a prolongation of the work that takes place in the text as such, a *sui generis* “primary process”, a force paving the way for the image, “deforming” the (fabular) original, the (supposedly) “original” order of events that remain inaccessible for interpretation as long as they are *plotted* (Brooks) or “focalised” (Bal).

*

(Blow-Up)

Although Brooks and Bal differ as regards the comprehension of the dynamic aspect of narration we can speak about an essential similarity linking both their interpretations. It becomes even more distinctive when we treat seriously that, which Brooks asserts at the end of his programme-like text (the first chapter, from which the title of the whole book is derived):

*Perhaps of greater interest than concept of plot (...) is that of plotting, the moments where we seize the active work of structuring revealed or dramatized in the text.*¹¹

Such a situation (*active work of structuring revealed or dramatized in the text*) can be simply defined as intradiegetic focalisation. Interestingly, Brooks too, even if only for a moment, concentrates his attention on the visual experience, referring to the *nice example* of the process of “plotting” the text not in literature but in the cinema – the famous scene from Antonioni’s *Blow-Up*. Here is the whole fragment:

The photographer-protagonist attempts to reconstruct what has occurred earlier in the day in a London park through the enlargement of the photographs he took in the park – and then enlargements of parts of his enlargements – and the arrangement of his photographs in an intentional sequence. What starts him on the reconstruction is the gaze of the girl in the photographs, the direction in which her eyes look: the gaze appears to seek an object, and by following its direction – and its intention – he discovers, shaded and barely visible, a face in the shrubbery and the glistening barrel of a pistol.. Then by following

*the direction of the pistol barrel – its aim or intention, he locates the zone of shadow under a tree which may represent a corpse, that of a man whom the girl was leading toward the shrubbery, perhaps towards a trap. In this scene of reconstruction, finding the right sequence of events, putting together the revelatory plot, depends on uncovering that “line of sight”, that aim and intention which will show how incidents link together. And finding, or inventing, the plot that seems to be hidden in the shadows of the park and in the grainy darkness of the photographs could alone give meaning to the events, which, while recorded through the veracious and revealing “objective” lens of the camera, remain unavailable to interpretation as long as they are not plotted.*¹²

Brooks’ commentary to this film scene (or rather that, which takes place in it at the level of diegesis – the attempt made by the photographer at constructing/deciphering the *sui generis photo-roman*, to use the term proposed by Chris Marker) – rather closely resembles the model-like analysis of focalisation presented by Mieke Bal in one of her earlier texts, written when she was still involved with visual narration (this is the reason why she treats it as *paradoxical because it is not linguistic*).¹³ The object of her brief analysis was a cliff bas-relief from Mahaballipuram in south India (said to be the largest in the world), showing three subjects: at the upper left – Arjuna in a penance position, and on the right, at the bottom – a cat meditating in a similar pose, surrounded by laughing mice.¹⁴

In order for the three-element entity to assume meaning the spectator must subject it to a holistic interpretation, for instance: the cat gazing at meditating Arjuna and under the impression of the beauty of his absolute tranquility follows his example; the mice, seeing the meditating cat, become aware of their impunity and start laughing. Without a similar interpretation (albeit not necessarily this particular one – we could, for example, assume that the clever cat is only deceiving, which adds suspense to the story) particular parts of the bas-relief-text remain separate, unconnected fragments; thanks to the interpretation they create a coherent and apparently comical narration. More importantly, *the relation between the sign (the relief) and its contents (the fabula) can only be established by mediation of an interjacent layer, the ‘view’ of the events. The cat sees Arjuna. The mice see the cat. The spectator sees the mice which see the cat who has seen Arjuna. And the spectator sees that the mice are right. Every verb of perception (to see) in this report indicates an activity of focalization. Each verb of action indicates an event. Only due to such semiotic activity on the part of the actors (i.e. thanks to inner-diegetic focalisation) do events of the fabula form an entity and become “woven” into a logical chronological chain.*

This is what the (re)construction, which is carried out by Thomas (David Hemming, acting as if in our name) in *Blow-Up* consists of – the establishment of inner-diegetic, *p e r c e p t i v e* relations between the characters (Brooks: *line of sight*). Thanks to them it is possible to formulate an interpretation without which particular photographs will remain separate images not comprising a cohesive story.

True, in both cases the effect of interpreting is the way in which the events connect with each other, i.e. a logical sequence of events (the *fabula*), but (as Brooks subtly overlooked) the very *p r o c e s s* of deciphering the text, based on establishing the directions of the gaze, is no longer strictly linear and “irreversible”. When we stand in front of the bas-relief from Mahaballipuram or look at its reproduction then in contrast to “ordinary” naive *reading for the plot* the eye has constantly in front of it the viewed parts and can look at them time after time (as Gotthold Lessing wrote about the painterly image).¹⁵ We may thus endlessly recreate and upon numerous occasions analyse each gesture and look, reconstructing in this manner all possible configurations – we see not only that, which the actors see but also the whole image.

The same holds true for the scene in *Blow-Up* – true, the wall in Thomas’ studio features fragments of a successively reconstructed diegesis chain but, after all, the earlier ones did not vanish and sometimes only change their place. The skilfully construed film tension is displayed in the spectator’s prolonged, silent anticipation of the “research effect” that is to stem from the repeated oscillating motion performed by Thomas’ gaze (and together with him – that of the viewer) along the axis of inner-diegetic localisations linking particular photographs (i.e. connecting particular fragments of the story, which only now, within the process of reading, are spatially and synchronically arranged). In a certain sense this is a situation in which *la relecture*, which Roland Barthes calls for in *S/Z*, is inevitable.

The dynamic of this scene (building the spectator’s tension) transpires, however, in yet another domain, ostensibly permeating the surface of the photographic image and penetrating its diegetic space – in the repeated motion of successive close-ups of the examined object, the titular blow-up of selected and once again photographed fragments of the photograph (Brooks: *enlargements of parts of his enlargements*). Let us note, however, that essentially this is the same motion as previously, only now Thomas (as the *narratee*, with whom we identify ourselves) accepts the subjective point of view of the actors-focalisers of the story: first Jane, the girl in the photograph (Vanessa Redgrave) and the man-future victim, and then the murderer (marked with the barrel of a pistol). This operation is undertaken in the hope of *t e a r i n g t h r o u g h* the surface of the image, in the hope that such transitive-

ness is feasible and that thanks to it we shall reach “the depths” (of the mystery), the *u l t i m a t e* (i.e. primeval) truth of the depiction. This is, however, an illusory hope, since the gaze penetrating that intra-diegetic void, even armed with a magnifying glass, cannot attain its goal: before it reveals the sought detail of the diegesis it will immerse itself in the matter of the image.¹⁶ Peter Brooks was right when he wrote that the photographic *intrigue* reconstructed in Antonioni’s film is concealed not only in the shadows of the park but also in the grainy darkness of the photograph. In certain takes of this scene we see the photogrammes hanging from a plank from the back, overexposed by light falling from the front, which seems to assure us that there is nothing more *besides* them.

This gesture “towards the interior” of the image, the “detail”, also possesses a distinctly oscillating potential – each “there” motion (not fully satisfactory) is immediately accompanied by a “back again” motion necessary for restoring the feeling of “entity”. Naturally, there is not enough space here to present, even as briefly as possible, the aporia of “suitable distance” in painting or literature, a problem associated with the question of matter, detail and truth.¹⁷ Let us only mention, therefore, that the concealed consequence of this careful look “inside” or the “back and forth” motion (*va-et-vient* or *fort-da*), which accelerates and cannot be halted, is the ability to dazzle (used as a film effect by, for example, Alfred Hitchcock in *Vertigo*).

This is connected with yet another circumstance, which Brooks basically omitted, namely, that in the analysed film scene, rendering dramatic the work of structuring the narration, the text subjected to that work (diegesis “plotting” the order) are the photographs. Brooks only expressed the opinion (which probably echoes those of Sontag or Barthes) that the “veracity” or “novelty” of the camera lens alone is insufficient to endow meaning to the presented events. Naturally, this does not give rise to doubts – such “denotation” objectivism of photography is not enough (it cannot do without *intrigue*, the active construction that enroots meaning). Nonetheless, and just as importantly, the photograph “conceals” this insufficiency by staging (somewhat like the autobiography in another order) absolute adhesion to previous reality (and in this fashion encourages to go on a journey to the innermost recesses of image diegesis).¹⁸

In the photographic text deciphered by Thomas we are, therefore, dealing not only with inner focalisation but also — in an extremely strict meaning of the term! – with extra-diegetic focalisation. The photograph reconstructs the chain of events (from the looks cast by the actors-focalizers he plots an *intrigue*) but as if forgetting that they had been *already* captured in the optic of his camera. Here, the photographer’s camera is naturally an “apparatus” (a device, a *dispositif*, a dis-

position, a distribution) thanks to which the spectator (Thomas) sees *everything*, i.e. that (everything), which his device permits him to see (it can be treated as a concretisation of a more general "ideological" construction, inscribed, for example, into the curiosity or "gaze" of the photographer). The very fact of re-glamentation, however, conceals this "panoptical" apparatus. This recalls the situation of literary narration, in which the "external focalizer" ("narrator-focalizer") basically *knows everything about the represented world*¹⁹ (Genette calls this "zero level focalisation"), a situation in which the most problematic is, naturally, that "everything".

Extra-diegetic focalisation, comprehended as a "device", a "dispositif" of pictorial narration, forces us to see something (ourselves?) in a *certain manner*. But the "ideological apparatus" is not the end of the work performed by focalisation.²⁰ By formatting the visual field, defining it and subjecting it to a certain code it simultaneously becomes the end of the image, no longer subjected to that code and comprising as if the "borderland" of pictorial representation. Regardless whether we speak in spatial categories about its devices ("frame", "background", "plan"²¹) or about impenetrable material quality (*opacitas*) there will always exist certain negativity evading the symbolic order, an "externality" penetrating the coded interior (following the example of Benjamin one could describe it as an "aura", and by emulating Barthes – as *punctum*).²²

As a rule, the spectator, the "panoptical" observer, is unaware of the fact that that, which he *ultimately* sees (i.e. "everything") is a function of *nothing*; that significance will be always the function of "weave" or "suture" (to use a term much valued in film studies), supplementing the original lack. Sometimes, however, that "lack", in the manner of a wound, cannot heal and thus *betrays* its presence. This betrayal can be rendered dramatic, as in the celebrated film *The Matrix*, where, as we remember, the protagonists struggle for the restoration of the consciousness, the true memory of people submerged in an artificially created virtual image. One of them, however, betrays his companions having succumbed to the temptation of the *simulacrum*: he prefers the pleasures of illusion to truth. At the same time, he has an evocative, diabolical name: Cypher ("figure", "cipher", "zero", "nothing"), which defines him, his "wicked" moral condition as a scandalous impossibility of *suture*, a permanent lack of the stable enrootment of his subjective identity in previous reality, as a mere *placeholder* open to endlessly different meanings.²³

In the discussed scene in *Blow-Up* Thomas has a similarly alienating experience – the more he examines the interior of the image the less he finds cognitively satisfying *source* contents (the same from which Cypher, submerging himself once again in the virtual image,

intentionally resigns). This adventure differs from the other experiences of the film character because Thomas is the only to plan to proceed to the end (or rather – to the "beginning"), expecting that in reconstructed photographic reality he will discover *something* that will resolve the puzzle; to put it differently – that will tie together the unhampered chain of glances, successively referring one to another, and finally stabilise, enroot, and "thin out" (just as one thins out young plants) those *signifiants* into some sort of an ultimate (source) *signifié*.²⁴ Instead of that, which he lacks there appears in the centre of the final image an inconclusive *nothing* (*cipher*): a corpse decomposed by a grainy photograph (is this not, as Lacan put it, death as *signifiant* and exclusively as *significant*?).²⁵ This photograph – "pure image", pure pictorial vitality – ceases to differ from the abstract works painted by Bill, the photographer's friend: paintings that did not emulate anything preceding them and whose ever potential "content" is designed *ex post*. This is why it becomes unimportant that someone who during the photographer's absence removes all traces of the *intrigue* from his studio has carelessly left behind precisely this photograph.

The "device" set into motion – extra-diegetic focalisation, an irremovable component of the narrative discourse (the true "matter" of the image, which should not be confused with the pictorial "medium" or "body"²⁶) – appears to be not only an instrument of a certain ideology, but largely a mechanism that sets into motion the process of self-destruction. In other words (and putting it differently than Mieke Bal) the visual drive (the focalisation drive) ultimately proves to be the drive of death looking at me.

This is why great importance for understanding this scene belongs to the above-mentioned frames in which the camera leaves the bright side of the stage, that of the "audience", in order to show Thomas from an unusual angle, namely, from behind a row of hanging photogrammes. In this fashion, the camera not only demonstrates that the photographs seen from the back are "flat" and nothing can be concealed in them "deeper", but – abandoning for a moment the photographer, i.e. the intra-diegetic subject focalising the photographic narration – it betrays also its autonomous nature as an instance focalising that scene on a higher (filmic) level of narration. This particular, "obscure" point of view as if activates the photographs' ability to look – it is now they, the images, that seem to be spying on him in the manner of phantoms haunting their creator. He, seen by/through the photographs, as if cropped by them, is deprived of the privilege of an author's subjectivity.

This is a trap with no exit. As a subject, Thomas is doomed to suffer cognitive defeat because he is unable to capture suitable distance to the "device". On the one hand, he is "too near": his eye cannot free itself

from the photographic camera, which incessantly mediates in relations with the world by capturing, cropping, formatting and changing life into a lifeless image (the photographer sees only that, which he had photographed); on the other hand, the (film) camera is "too far". Thomas does not see it although he is observed by it, as if "photo-graphed" (a term used by Lacan), thus turning into an image.²⁷ If within that "dialectic of the eye and gaze" – his eye and the camera looking at him – there does not take place an ultimate "coincidence" then the only reason is that this phantom gaze masks and conceals itself. Where? On the surface of the image – that exact image whose part Thomas has become – on the outer level of diegesis (naturally, that extra-diegetic level cannot be identified with the empirical "film set" and actual camera, but only with a focalisation instance, whose existence is suggested by the position of the camera).

There is no need to add that we are talking about two cameras only for the sake of convenience. The images disturbing Thomas are, after all, the photographs that he had taken with his camera. In other words, the extra-diegetic "camera" (its concealed, focusing gaze) is the externality that penetrates the interior of the observed image, violating its semiotic lucidity and mimetic obviousness. This is the reason why the drama of that scene does not take place amidst signs, even if they were difficult to decipher, but in that impossible fissure (*schize*), which by violating the cohesion of the intra-diegetic "symbolic order" deprives the signs of their referential power. This semiotic impasse rendering the image *untamed* must signify also the *powerlessness* of the subject absorbed by the image. To put it more precisely, I have in mind *impotentia*, the reason why we are incapable of observing moral principles stabilising our life; this, in turn, increases our licentiousness (this is exactly the way in which the ancients understood the term: *impotens homo*, Greek: ἀκρατής or ἀκόλαστος: powerless, lacking self-control, debauched in the manner of an animal, *libidinosus*).²⁸

The protagonist of *Blow-Up* in his capacity of a photographer appears to be a privileged subject of the scopic (spectator – image) relation enjoying a special right to believe that the representations he had created also belong to him. Paradoxically, however, as a "photo-graphed photographer" (resembling *L'Arroseur arrosé* in the film by the brothers Lumière) he too becomes an image. Antonioni did not describe this process in a manner known from numerous horror or fantasy films, in which the hero discovers that lifeless painted portraits or dolls and mannequins seem to be looking at him with living eyes. Here, this demonic instance of the gaze (as if the sphere of the netherworld) is (similarly as in the conceptions of Lacan) "outside", *au-dehors*, which in this instance de-

notes relegation beyond the plan of narrative diegesis – it turns into extra-diegetic focalisation effectively preventing all attempts at its intra-diegetic symbolisation.

Endnotes

- ¹ G. Genette, *Discours du récit. Essai de méthode*, in: *Figures III*, Seuil, Paris 1972, pp. 203-224 (see also the essay: *Stendhal*, in: idem: *Figures II*, 1969).
- ² Mieke Bal, *Narratologie: essais sur la signification narrative dans quatre romans modernes*, Klincksieck, Paris 1977; *De theorie van vertellen en verhalen: inleiding in de narratologie*, Muiderberg, Coutinho, 1978. The first English language version of the second publication: *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, transl. Ch. van Boheemen, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1985 (fragment on focalisation: pp. 100-114). Here I use also the "completely altered" third edition (University of Toronto Press 2009).
Writings on focalisation are vast; owing to the fact that my remarks are a sketch I refer only to several most important publications: S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Routledge, London and New York 2002 (first edition 1983), pp. 72-87 and passim; W. Edmiston, *Focalization and the First-Person Narrator: A Revision of the Theory*, "Poetics Today" 1989, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 729-744; W. Nelles, *Getting Focalization into Focus*, "Poetics Today" 1990, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 365-382; M. Jahn, *Windows of focalization: Deconstruction and reconstructing a narratological concept*, "Style" 1996, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 241-267; G. Nieragden, *Focalization and Narration: Theoretical and Terminological Refinements*, "Poetics Today", 2002, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 685-697. Critical current: S. Chatman, *Characters and Narrators: Filter, Center, Slant, and Interest-Focus*, "Poetics Today", 1986, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 189-204 (see also: *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1980); Franz Karl Stanzel, *A Theory of Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*, Routledge, New York. 1996. On focalisation in film see, i.a.: François Jost, *Narration(s): en deça et au delà*, "Communications" 1983, no. 38, pp. 192-212; André Gaudreault, François Jost, *Cinéma et récit, Le récit cinématographique*, Nathan, Paris 1990; Celestino Deleyto, *Focalisation in Film Narrative*, "Atlantis" 1991, vol. 13, no.1-2, pp. 159-77 (reprint in: *Narratology: An Introduction*, Susana Onega, José Angel García Landa (eds.), Longman, London 1996, pp. 217-233).
- ³ In *Narratology* those elements correspond to three chapters entitled: 1. *Text: Words and Other Signs*; 2. *Story: Aspects*; 3. *Fabula: Elements*.
- ⁴ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., London 1992 (original edition: Clarendon Press, New York 1984).
- ⁵ Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, vol. I: *L'intrigue et le récit historique*, Seuil, Paris 1983 (*Time and Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984; *Czas i opowieść*, vol. I: *Intryga i historyczna opowieść*, transl. Jarosław Jakubowski, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008).
- ⁶ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the plot*, [in:] *Reading for the plot*, op. cit., pp. 3-36, quotation on p. 13.

- ⁷ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, transl. Michał Paweł Markowski and Maria Gołębiowska, Wydawnictwo KR, Warszawa 1999. See also: B. Johnson, *Różnica krytyczna*, transl. M. Adamczyk, in: *Dekonstrukcja w badaniach literackich*, Ryszard Nycz (ed.), słowo/obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2000. A serious critique of the conceptions launched by Brooks, especially his comprehension of Freudism, is presented by J. Clayton, *Narrative and Theories of Desire*, "Critical Inquiry" 1989, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 33-53.
- ⁸ The first is the subject of the statement (locution act); the second is the subject of vision (quasi-perception act), which is the content of that statement; the third is the subject acting in history, which is the content of vision. The narrator, the focaliser and the actor are three inner-textual subjects that can be personally identical or different. See: Mieke Bal, *Notes on Narrative Embedding*, "Poetics Today" 1981, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 41-59, especially pp. 44-45.
- ⁹ I.a. *Reading "Rembrandt"*, op. cit.; *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1999; *The Mottled Screen. Reading Proust Visually*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1997, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2002. On the oeuvre of Mieke Bal see: Łukasz Zaremba, *Mieke Bal – poza opozycją słowa i obrazu?*, in: *Słowo/obraz*, "Communicare. Almanach antropologiczny", no. 3, pp. 203-216.
- ¹⁰ Mieke Bal, *Preface to the Second Edition*, [in:] *Narratology*, second edition, 1997. This is the reason why in the second edition of *Narratology* Mieke Bal reversed the order of chapters describing three levels of narration: the book does not start with: *Fabula: Elements*, as was the case in the first edition, but with: *Text: Words and Other Signs* (chapter 2 is about: *Story: Aspects*). See also: Jonathan Culler, *Story and Discourse*, [in:] *The Pursuit of Signs*, op. cit.; Peter Brooks, op. cit., p. 13.
- ¹¹ P. Brooks, op. cit., p. 35.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 35 (my emphasis – W.M.).
- ¹³ Mieke Bal, *The Laughing Mice, or: On Focalisation*, "Poetics Today" 1981, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 202-210. This example was included into *Narratology*: in the first edition from 1985 the author still maintained the opinion about its paradoxical nature (*This example, paradoxical because it is not linguistic, illustrates that much better*); in the third edition we read: *This example illustrates quite clearly the theory of focalization. Incidentally, it also suggests that, and how narratological concepts are relevant for the analysis of visual narrative without absorbing the image in language (Narratology, third edition, p. 149)*.
- ¹⁴ After: Mieke Bal, *The Laughing Mice...*, op. cit., p. 203.
- ¹⁵ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon czyli o granicach malarstwa i poezji*, part I, prep. Jolanta Maurin Białostocka, transl. Henryk Zymon-Dębicki, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1962, p. 70.
- ¹⁶ On the image see: W. Michera, *Kompleks Echidny. (Bestia wizualna)*, "Konteksty" 2006, no. 1, pp. 47-67.
- ¹⁷ On this topic there are two slightly different approaches (basically, with divergent ways of reading the book by Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1983): Georges Didi-Huberman, *Question détail, question de pan*, op. cit. and Louis Marin, *Éloge de l'apparence*, [in:] *De la représentation*, op. cit., pp. 235-250 (*In Praise of Appearance*, "October" 1986, vol. 37, pp. 99-112).
- ¹⁸ See: Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida*, chapter 41.
- ¹⁹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, op. cit., p. 80.
- ²⁰ Simplifying things somewhat one could say that this is the interpretation proposed by the conception of the "cinematic apparatus" (Baudry, Comolli, Mulvey), based on a mistaken comprehension of Lacan. We owe a critique of this conception mainly to Joan Copjec (i.a. *The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan*, "October" 1989, vol. 49, pp. 53-71, and later works). See also: C. Saper, *A Nervous Theory: The Troubling Gaze of Psychoanalysis in Media Studies*, "Diacritics" 1991, vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 33-52. The conceptions proposed by Joan Copjec were expanded in recent years by T. McGowan (*Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes*, "Cinema Journal" 2003, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 27-47; idem, *Realne spojrzenie. Teoria filmu po Lacanie*, transl. K. Mikurda, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2008).
- ²¹ Cf. Louis Marin, *Le cadre de la représentation et quelques-unes de ses figures*, in: *De la représentation*, op. cit., pp. 342-363.
- ²² See: W. Benjamin, *In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us (The Arcades Project, M 16 a, 4)*.
- ²³ The concept of *suture* appears in Lacan's XI seminar, where it is defined as: *la pseudo-identification (Les quatre concepts fondamentaux*, op. cit., p. 133: *Réponses* in chapter: *Qu'est-ce qu'un tableau?*). On *suture* and "zero" value in *du signifiant* logic - the presence of a gap calling for supplementation - see: Jacques-Allan Miller, *Suture*, "Cahiers pour l'analyse" 1966, no. 1. On *suture* in film theory: Jean-Pierre Oudart, *Suture*, [in:] *Panorama współczesnej myśli filmowej*, Alicja Helman (ed.), Universitas, Kraków 1992, pp. 19-32; Alicja Helman, entry: *Suture* in: *Słownik pojęć filmowych*, vol. 2, *Wiedza o kulturze*, Wrocław 1991. On *Cypher* see: Wojciech Michera, *Ekranizacja pamięci. O filmie Memento Christophera Nolana*, [in:] S. Wróbel (ed.), *Iluzje pamięci*, Wydawnictwo WPA UAM, Kalisz 2007, pp. 81-97 (especially pp. 93-4); see also: Wojciech Michera, *Bezdomność Odyseusza*, "Konteksty" 2010, no. 2.
- ²⁴ In Lacan's terminology *le point de capiton* enables *signifiant* to halt the slippage of meaning that cannot be described otherwise. Naturally, it does so only for a time being (cf. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1966, p. 805).
- ²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux...*, op. cit., p. 286.
- ²⁶ For the image the "medium" is an outer carrier and matter is its irremovable property. The mentioned error is exemplified by the "anthropology of the image" devised by Hans Belting, in which "matter" constitutes an imperfect form of the "medium" (see: Hans Belting, *Antropologia obrazu: szkice do nauki o obrazie*, transl. Mariusz Bryl, Universitas, Kraków 2007; and in particular: *Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology*, "Critical Inquiry" 2005, vol 31, pp. 302-319; see also: Wojciech Michera, *Śmierć obrazu*, "Konteksty" 2010, no. 1).
- ²⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux...*, op. cit., p. 111 (*La ligne et la lumière*).
- ²⁸ See: Plato, *Republic* 590 a (licentiousness).

*The times may be bad, but we can still have some talk
about art!*

H. Balzac, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*

1.

Almost 200 years after being written Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* still radiates a mysterious glow.¹ The text is enveloped in a curious aura and the extraordinary rays produced by the backdrop are discernible in numerous fields. This is not merely a literary phenomenon, which I envisage as consisting of its fictional character, but also enclosure within a world of literature circulation and purely textual analyses. The short story distinctly leans towards life and in assorted ways transcends the limits of the world of fiction. For years *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* has been an important point of reference for numerous significant painters. The reflections contained therein, focused on creativity, the artist and art,² became an ideological programme and road-sign, and the attitude represented by Maître Frenhofer is an ideal of an artist selflessly devoted to art and seeking perfection. Balzac's story left the domain of literary fiction, becoming a strong and permanent myth for artistic consciousness.

Certain painters regarded the text as surety and an outright talisman. Paul Cézanne discovered himself in the Frenhofer character. This gesture of a serious attitude towards an, after all, fictional character denotes something more than mere confirmation of superficial similarity; it comprises total identification. In his reminiscences Emil Bernard recalled how one evening he mentioned the text by Balzac, and the painter *got up from the table, planted himself before me, and, striking his chest with his index finger, designated himself – without a word, but through this repeated gesture – as the very person in the story. He was so moved that tears filled his eyes.*³ Picasso too admired the novel and identified himself with Frenhofer, although apparently for different reasons. He was commissioned by the art dealer Vollard to illustrate the story and the drawings were shown at a separate exhibition. By an incomprehensible coincidence while renting an atelier in Paris he lived in the same street and house as Balzac's protagonist! Balthus in a conversation with Constantini recalled: *Par une mystérieuse coïncidence, le protagoniste de la nouvelle, le peintre Frenhofer, avait son atelier dans la maison même ou Picasso avait le sien, au 7, rue des Grands-Augustins. C'est Dora Maar qui lui avait trouvé...*⁴ It was here that in 1937 Picasso painted *Guernica*.⁵ The story also became the object of many critical dissertations analysing its assorted aspects: historical, literary, aesthetic, and ideological.⁶ Their number is so great that as one of the methodical commentators maintained *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* is next to *Sarrasine* so buried in critical discourse that it is hard to write about them at all.⁷ At the beginning of the 1990s it served as the basis for

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Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu. Balzac and Rivette

Jacques Rivette's film: *La Belle Noiseuse*, an improvised variation on a theme described with enormous expertise and inner fire by Balzac.⁸

Already this brief summary shows clearly that *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* is not only a "capacious form" but extremely so. Balzac's text was treated as a convenient and almost practical collection of instructions for a good film, and its lead character played the part of an exemplary artist. The story functioned as an experimental testing field for assorted schools of interpretations. Ultimately, it became a source of inspiration and a prolific point of departure for a film scenario. Indubitably, *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* contains some sort of semantic excess offering much food for thought. Depending on the questions addressed to it the text demonstrates an ever-new side in the manner of a kaleidoscope whose slightest movement reveals a different pattern. In the commentary presented below and constructed so as to resemble a diptych I resigned from totalising ambitions and concentrated only on a single issue – that of the image.

First, I shall take a closer look at the way in which the text tells the story of the phenomenon of the painting, the significance attached to it, and the aesthetic controversies it involves. Next, I shall confront this knowledge with the film narration proposed by Rivette. In other words, at the onset we shall see how the image appears in the text and later how this (painterly) image functions in an (film) image. Right away, however, it is worth stressing that although I place the two types of discourse alongside each other this is not a study inclined towards problems associated with film adaptation. I am interested, predominantly, in the rhetoric of a conversation about the ontology of the image: not only what it is but also the manner in which it exists and, more extensively, the differences between the image in the text and the film as well as the consequences of its comprehension for understanding the tasks and essence of art in general. Since the image, mentioned to such a great extent in the text and the film, remains a mystery in itself then

talking about it cannot follow merely simple intellectual trajectories.

2.

Balzac situated his story in the distant past (conceived as such by him and even more so by us), i.e. the year 1612. This renders its subsequent impact even more interesting. We see clearly that although the story is precisely placed in time, as is usually the case with Balzac's texts, the conclusions drawn from it certainly transcend the historical *milieu*. The general framework is a passionate – in every meaning of that word – dispute on the nature of art. This literary discussion about painting conducted by various participants, about the meaning of painting, the elementary principles and rigours of the craft also concerns dangerous connections between life and art. The prime protagonists are three artists: old Frenhofer, Probus in his prime, and the youngest: Nicholas Poussin, resembling three personifications of the spirit of time: past, present and future.⁹ These characters belong to different worlds of painting and represent three dissimilar approaches to painting. But this is not all: in the background of the “masculine” dispute about the tasks of art there are two women with a different, so to speak, ontological status: the “lifeless” Catherine, Frenhofer's former model, existing as a painted character immobilised on canvas, and the “living” young and attractive Gillette composed of a beautiful body and unconcealed emotions. Although they occupy the backdrop of the story their role is not limited merely to being extras. On the contrary: it is exactly around the two women that meanings essential for the story are construed. The yardstick of the force of Balzac's literary work is the fact that we react to the fictional figure of Frenhofer as much more real than those of Probus and Poussin, who, after all, possess concrete, historical models! It is also quite possible that such a reaction is, as Arthur Danto wrote, homage paid to the fact that the highly Romanticised vision of art, and in particular painting, from whose viewpoint Balzac conceived Frenhofer and his *chef-d'oeuvre*, continues to remain even in an age of cynicism and deconstruction the strongest component of our comprehension of art and certainly of painting.¹⁰

The three painters meet in Probus' studio. Frenhofer, an outstanding artist, is a legend among painters, while the young Poussin takes part in the gathering somewhat by chance. Probus presents his work to the master who without sparing his friend's feelings openly and methodically criticises it. During the visit at the studio Poussin finds out that the old man has not been painting for years. More, he had abandoned work on a canvas that he had been executing for ten years: *La Belle Noiseuse*, which he intended to be his masterpiece. Now, he frenziedly conceals the canvas

and no one has even seen it. Poussin experiences a powerful wish to view the masterpiece-to-be but Frenhofer guards it jealously and refuses all requests. Poussin thus devises a plan for ignoring the prohibition and conducts a curious transaction. His beautiful fiancée, Gillette, is to become the master's model so that he could complete the painting and in return allow Poussin and Probus to see the finished work. Gillette agrees, mainly due to her feelings for Poussin although with certain reservations. Several months later, Probus appears in the master's atelier with the proposal. The enraged Frenhofer refuses to hear anything about his work and his woman being tainted by the eyes of another man. At that very moment enter Poussin and Gillette. Frenhofer ultimately capitulates, aware that this is probably the last possible opportunity for completing the canvas. He has been seeking a suitable model for years, but to no avail. A few minutes later Probus and Poussin appear in the studio and stand in front of *La Belle Noiseuse*. To their great astonishment they see nothing but a chaotic tangle of lines and unidentified shapes. The irritated painter throws them out and on the next day they learn that Frenhofer died that night. Before passing away he managed to burn all his works.

The entire story depicts a battle for understanding the nature of painting, the essence of the art of depiction. The prime protagonist is Frenhofer and the other two painters mainly listen, with only Probus at times joining the dispute. Frenhofer not only creates art but is also its self-proclaimed theoretician. His exalted reflections show that he is totally convinced that he is right. This is not purely discursive “intellectual” knowledge; its legitimation is the whole *oeuvre* of the great Frenhofer and in particular his last, unfinished work. But what did Frenhofer really have in mind while speaking about painting? What did he regard as the “perfect painting”? What properties of painting are decisive for being worthy of inclusion into the domain of art? What is a masterpiece? Time for a closer look.

Frenhofer, as has been mentioned, was, above all, a practician testing a painting with his hand and eye.¹¹ At the Probus studio he examines a canvas entitled: *Saint Mary of Egypt* by his younger colleague. An outstanding work, more: considered by his contemporaries to be a masterpiece. For a few moments Frenhofer penetrates it with his keen glance but the verdict he pronounces is far from commonplace admiration. His ruthless assessment of the work by another artist is, however, an excellent directive for finding out which traits the master considered to be contemptible and which deserving his praise.

Your good woman is not badly done, but she is not alive. You artists fancy that when a figure is correctly drawn, and everything in its place according to the rules

of anatomy, there is nothing more to be done. You make up the flesh tints beforehand on your palettes according to your formulae, and fill in the outlines with due care that one side of the face shall be darker than the other; and because you look from time to time at a naked woman who stands on the platform before you, you fondly imagine that you have copied nature, think yourselves to be painters, believe that you have wrested His secret from God.¹²

Elementary skills of anatomical drawing, sensitivity to colour, technical adroitness, ability to apply the rules of composition – all are conditions necessary for creating an outstanding work but, apparently, insufficient. Frenhofer's opinion is cruel towards those painters who are convinced that workshop skills are adequate to enter the land of art. *You may know your syntax thoroughly and make no blunders in your grammar, but it takes that and something more to make a great poet*; it is not enough to be acquainted with the basics of painting and the fundamental rules of the grammar of creation to paint a great masterpiece. Furthermore, taking a closer look at the canvas Frenhofer notices a serious, disqualifying fault:

Look at your saint, Probus! At a first glance she is admirable; look at her again, and you see at once that she is glued to the background, and that you could not walk round her. She is a silhouette that turns but one side of her face to all beholders, a figure cut out of canvas, an image with no power to move or change her position. I feel as if there were no air between that arm and the background, no space, no sense of distance in your canvas. The perspective is perfectly correct, the strength of the coloring is accurately diminished with the distance; but, in spite of these praiseworthy efforts, I could never bring myself to believe that the warm breath of life comes and goes in that beautiful body. It seems to me that if I laid my hand on the firm, rounded throat, it would be cold as marble to the touch. No, my friend, the blood does not flow beneath that ivory skin, the tide of life does not flush those delicate fibers, the purple veins that trace a network beneath the transparent amber of her brow and breast. Here the pulse seems to beat, there it is motionless, life and death are at strife in every detail; here you see a woman, there a statue, there again a corpse.

Ignore at this point comments about the instruments of poetic ecphrasis used brilliantly by Balzac in this fragment (and not only here). We are dealing with a lucidly outlined ideal of Frenhofer's aesthetics. If a painted body is to become something more than a faithfully copied shape it must come alive. From the flat depiction that it invariably is it has to change into a quasi-three-dimensional object. The two-dimensional surface must become a spatial solid, a shape that is to produce the effect of warm, living reality pulsating with blood. To put it differently: the ideal of the female body shown on canvas is to be a spatial sculpture. This, as it follows unambiguously from the cited argu-

ment, belongs to the alchemy of art: thanks to skill and talent (genius?) two dimensions are to become three. The illusion is to be complete and should not require any sort of appeal. It is to hypnotise the viewer, to wield absolute power over him, to become the reason why the depicted figure is not solely a source of aesthetic pleasure but also "leaves the frame", materialises itself right in front of the viewer and becomes part of life. And *vice versa*: if such directives are ignored then a painting will "be not quite right"; true, it could possess well executed particular parts but as a whole it will be dead, lifeless, just as *Saint Mary of Egypt, a colorless creature*.

Just to make things clear: according to Frenhofer the canvas under discussion was not bad or totally devoid of values; on the contrary: (...) *this picture of yours is worth more than all the paintings of that rascal Rubens, but it lacked something extremely essential. What? Yes, truly, a woman carries her head in just such a way, so she holds her garments gathered into her hand; her eyes grow dreamy and soft with that expression of meek sweetness, and even so the quivering shadow of the lashes hovers upon her cheeks. It is all there, and yet it is not there. What is lacking? A nothing, but that nothing is everything. There you have the semblance of life, but you do not express its fullness and effluence, that indescribable something, perhaps the soul itself, that envelopes the outlines of the body like a haze (...)*. Yes, that "nothing" makes the difference, and in the domain of art – a colossal difference. In the brutal painting lesson given to Probus and Poussin three things appear to be clear. First, the difference between ordinary painting and true art is not measured only by the degree of mastery of the workshop. It belongs to another domain and corresponds exactly to the difference between life and death. Secondly: a person who can boast that he has captured the resemblance of the portrayed sitter does not deserve to be called an artist. The true artist possesses the gift of bringing the dead to life. Thirdly: it is evident that the thus comprehended art of painting transcends far beyond the skill of an artisan and becomes an occupation on the borderline of magic, in a word: theurgy.

Probus, however, does not admit to defeat and claims that all that he had accomplished on the canvas was executed in accordance with the inalienable rigours of art. At the same time, he complains that Nature is prone to changes and that there exist such natural phenomena that cannot be rendered on canvas. Frenhofer responds instantly and in a manner that leaves no illusion as regards such a barren approach to the tasks of painting:

The aim of art is not to copy nature, but to express it. You are not a servile copyist, but a poet! (...) We must detect the spirit, the informing soul in the appearances of things and beings. Effects! What are effects but the ac-

idents of life, not life itself? (...) Many a painter achieves success instinctively, unconscious of the task that is set before art. You draw a woman, yet you do not see her! Not so do you succeed in wresting Nature's secrets from her! You are reproducing mechanically the model that you copied in your master's studio. You do not penetrate far enough into the inmost secrets of the mystery of form; you do not seek with love enough and perseverance enough after the form that baffles and eludes you. Beauty is a thing severe and unapproachable, never to be won by a languid lover. You must lie in wait for her coming and take her unawares, press her hard and clasp her in a tight embrace, and force her to yield. Form is a Proteus more intangible and more manifold than the Proteus of the legend; compelled, only after long wrestling, to stand forth manifest in his true aspect.

These comments appear to be the *clou* of Frenhofer's arguments. Painting that attains the dimension of art does not *copy* anything, does not transfer onto the canvas "the way it is" in a manner in which a comparison of the real and the painted resembles two concurrent sides of an algebra equation, but fulfils itself in the function of *expressing*. What does this mean precisely? Here, the noun "poetry" is undoubtedly a metaphor and signifies, presumably, a special ability to transpose life, reality – regardless of its nature – into the matter of the artwork but in such a mode so that that, which is painted would not turn into a simple replica of the obvious but would become equipped with the earlier mentioned "effluence". Admittedly, this is not an excessively precise formulation but it is probably a cryptonym for the extraordinary aura and force of *sui generis* surrealism emanated only by masterpieces, which all other paintings lack. Remarks about the form, in particular its intangibility, are also noteworthy. Capturing it, Frenhofer declared avidly, is extremely difficult and calls not so much for ordinary talent and enormous work but also something more: the creation of special conditions in order to offer hope for seizing it better. Thanks to the patient effort of looking the artist creates only space in which form could then reveal itself. Form seems to appear at special moments preceded by mighty endeavours, at moments of some sort of a flash, intuition, possibly clairvoyance. In the language of religion: at moments of grace. This is perhaps the reason why Frenhofer executing on Probus's canvas humiliating corrections that will enable it to slowly "come alive", and, explaining patiently where the author had committed errors, says at the end: *Do not look too long at that canvas, young man (...). You would fall a victim to despair.* This probably means that in his opinion the author had not been granted the grace of seeing and that the extraordinary talent that he without doubt has at his disposal makes it possible to copy reality but certainly not to create a masterpiece. *Beauty is a thing severe and unapproachable...*

There is no better opportunity for testing the value of the master's arguments than to refer them to his works. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that Frenhofer hid the painting that could have disclosed his mastery and the secret of the qualities of a masterpiece. More, the reason why he does not want to show it is rather strange, but apparently stems, at least to a certain degree, from earlier remarks. Recall: his painting depicts the nude courtesan Catherine Lescaut. Its tabooisation comes directly from a conviction, expressed by the artist, about the essential identity of the image and the person! In other words, the point is not to conceal the secrets of art or the canvas from ineligible eyes but to withhold from the eyes of painters (men, after all!) the naked body of a woman dear to the artist:

But this picture, locked away above in my studio, is an exception in our art. It is not a canvas, it is a woman – a woman with whom I talk. I share her thoughts, her tears, her laughter. Would you have me fling aside these ten years of happiness like a cloak? Would you have me cease at once to be father, lover, and creator? She is not a creature, but a creation. Bring your young painter here. I will give him my treasures; I will give him pictures by Correggio and Michelangelo and Titian; I will kiss his footprints in the dust; but make him my rival! Shame on me. Ah! ah! I am a lover first, and then a painter. Yes, with my latest sigh I could find strength to burn my Belle Noiseuse; but – compel her to endure the gaze of a stranger, a young man and a painter! – Ah! no, no!

The unquestionably insane vision of the brilliant painter produced an overlapping and total merge of a real person and her depiction, the physical body and the painterly sign. In this situation, the painter abdicated from his profession and became a jealous lover. If this is the case then evidently the game of hide and seek no longer involves aesthetics but life itself. The issue at stake is not the canvas but the woman. No one has the right to look at her nude body because this would mean presenting it to obscene and pre-emptive gazes. Actually, it would be tantamount to putting it up for sale. Ultimately, however, Frenhofer, similarly to the young Poussin, traded body for body although in both cases the direction of this transaction, so to speak, was different. Poussin sold part of his life in the name of art, while Frenhofer acted precisely on the contrary. Relegate to the margin the assessment of this artistic prostitution and see how *La Belle Noiseuse* was viewed. Unusually excited – *his face aglow with a more than human exaltation, his eyes glittered, he breathed hard like a young lover frenzied by love* – Frenhofer led both painters to his canvas:

Aha! he cried, you did not expect to see such perfection! You are looking for a picture, and you see a woman before you. There is such depth in that canvas, the atmosphere is so true that you cannot distinguish it from the air

that surrounds us. Where is art? Art has vanished, it is invisible! It is the form of a living girl that you see before you. Have I not caught the very hues of life, the spirit of the living line that defines the figure? Is there not the effect produced there like that which all natural objects present in the atmosphere about them, or fishes in the water? Do you see how the figure stands out against the background? Does it not seem to you that you pass your hand along the back? But then for seven years I studied and watched how the daylight blends with the objects on which it falls. And the hair, the light pours over it like a flood, does it not? ... Ah! she breathed, I am sure that she breathed! Her breast – ah, see! Who would not fall on his knees before her? Her pulses throb. She will rise to her feet. Wait!

To no avail. The admiration of the old master for his work proved to be premature. Both expert painters standing in front of the canvas did not demonstrate enthusiasm of any sort. Worse: they declared that the painting showed nothing! They saw only a chaotic composition and *confused masses of color and a multitude of fantastical lines* expressed in the original in even stronger terms: a wall of paint, *une muraille de peinture*.¹³ With a single exception: in the corner of the canvas they noticed a fragment worthy of attention: *un pied délicieux, un pied vivant*¹⁴ (the Polish translation unfortunately has: “leg”, thus destroying the whole fetishistic context of the fragment). This fraction of the masterpiece was, however, embedded in total chaos, shapelessness and indetermination. Both men, forced by Frenhofer to express their opinions, confirmed the initial examination. The old man did not give up: he either sobbed over his hapless impotence or obstinately claimed that under this external, visible chaos there is a discernible, despite all, shape of a woman, the emanation of true beauty.

What is this poignant scene about? Who is really wrong? What can be seen in the painting? What is the *une muraille de peinture* that shocks and violates the aesthetic habits of the viewers? Nothing here is quite certain. Danto was right when he wrote that reading this fragment we are left guessing: was it the old painter who had lost his senses or the young artists who had lost their sight?¹⁵ One more thing: why did Frenhofer burn his canvases? Before we try to cast some light on those questions and, at the same time, reveal at least part of the puzzle of the painting let us take a look at the way in which the initial plot scheme from Balzac's story has been transposed into the film. Let us see to what sort of transformations a literary discourse about painting literary has been subjected.

3.

Rivette shifted Balzac's story into contemporary times (the early 1990s) but the basic outline of the plot remains unchanged. A renowned painter, Edouard Frenhofer, leads a prosperous life together

with his family in a country residence in the south of France. This is retirement of sorts, life after life, since he has not created anything of importance for quite some time with the exception of several insignificant self-portraits. He had abandoned painting ten years earlier, not completing (being unable to complete? not wishing to complete?) a painting to which his wife, Liz, posed. On a certain hot summer day there arrives at his home a young painter, Nicholas, brought over by a popular art dealer Balthazar Probus, together with the artist's girlfriend, Marianne. Nicholas is delighted with the opportunity to make the acquaintance of the master whom he had admired for long. Nonetheless, he will not become the prime participant of a discussion about art. Frenhofer is enchanted with the beauty of the girl, not merely her external features but also some sort of an undefined force that she radiates. Faced with a proposal formulated by the dealer, who mentions that this is an exceptional chance to complete the painting, Nicholas agrees in her name, without asking Marianne about her opinion. He is obviously extremely proud that his girl will become Frenhofer's new muse. In other words, that he too will play a part, however slight, in the future masterpiece. Frenhofer agrees to the terms of this curious transaction. Having found out about the agreement the girl becomes upset and realises that art means more for her partner than she does. Ultimately, however, she agrees to pose. The old project is revived and there is a chance that *La Belle Noiseuse* will be completed. The outstanding painter initiates his work and the old artist and the young model spend the next few days alone in the solitude of the atelier. Day after day and hour after hour they share physical torment, with Frenhofer attempting to realise the impossible. After two days of posing Nicholas demonstrates signs of impatience and (after all!) jealousy; Liz too becomes anxious. But matters had already gone too far and the players are no longer performing their parts but obviously have started acting according to supra-individual rules. All the main protagonists are outfitted with a certain curious ambiguity, gradually revealing the originally concealed aspects of their personalities. Only Probus, the art expert and influential dealer, appears in the role of an unambiguous villain; at the same time, everything seems to suggest that he is Liz's former lover. It is he who commissioned Frenho to complete the painting and who will enjoy priority in purchasing it. For him the value of the canvas is measured with figures. It has a price also for the remaining *dramatis personae* but paid in perhaps a less measurable but certainly more painful currency: that of real life.

Let it be said straight away: Rivette's film is different from Balzac's story but it is also partly *about* something else. While stressing this dissimilarity I do not have in mind that the film treats literary matter in an-

other way or that it introduces solutions missing in the text. I rather emphasize the radical divergence of both media because it is exactly that feature, which proves to be essential for the basic configuration of meanings. That, which in the case of Balzac is only talked about (although his vocabulary possesses a creative force and affects the imagination extremely strongly) in Rivette's film is shown. In Balzac's novel we read about the paintings and in Rivette's film we actually see them (although not the most important canvas). More: the film offers us an opportunity to watch the painter working. As has been stressed upon numerous occasions, no other film about a painter's life, with painting as a theme, had ever placed such strong emphasis on the process of painting as such and its purely physical aspect. *La Belle Noiseuse* is possibly, first and foremost, not so much a film treatise about the essence of painting as about laborious, unattractive work brimming with errors and numerous stumbles and aimed at the ultimate achievement of an artistic effect, i.e. it deals with that, which in the technical vocabulary of aesthetics is known as the "creative process". There is less of the "metaphysics" of painting and much more of its "physics". Sketches, preliminary work, changes, repetitions, retouching and then everything once again, from the beginning. This is what successive stages of the origin of a painting look like. The director's extraordinary accomplishment consists of bringing the spectator close to all those operations by concentrating attention on the very process of painting: multiple close-ups of a hand drawing lines on paper, placing colour on canvas, extracting the first shape out of nothing. We closely observe the painter's hand (in this "part" the hand of the artist Bernard Dolour, who lent it to Michel Piccoli in the scenes of sketching and painting) using a pencil, a piece of charcoal, a feather, and a paintbrush. The plot takes place in complete silence, additionally enhanced (yes!) by sounds coming from the background, the sort of acoustic effects usually not heard in a film: the scratching of a feather on paper, the rustle of a pencil, the sound of a piece of paper being folded or cardboard being pinned on a board, etc. The sketching scenes and the initial studies of the figure are shown in almost real time and take up practically half of the film. Long takes, few cuts, slow motion, lengthy silence. No music wading the scenes. An image of the intimate activity of creation. A true non-action movie. All this produces the impression of participating in the emergence of a painting. Gradually, step-by-step, the viewer becomes drawn into the game. In the course of the four-hours long – and in places outright hypnotic – spectacle (and here the word is not misused since the film is clearly and, I believe, intentionally theatricalised) we take part in the birth of an artwork. The exhaustion of the spectator watching *La Belle Noiseuse* appears to be

only slightly lesser than that of the actors participating in the undertaking. Observing for countless minutes a hand drawing a line on paper we are just as irritated as fascinated! But such is the intentional strategy deployed by Rivette and maintained to the very end.

The act of painting, on par with preceding laborious portrait studies, is shown as a genuine cognitive process. Here, painting is not by any means a domain of aesthetic pleasure but a distinctly cognitive activity. Marianne takes off her bathrobe and stands naked in front of the painter. Much time will pass before he finds that one pose that reveals her concealed interior (afterwards, the girl tries to assist him in this task). He treats his model in the same manner as a sculptor approaching clay: no sentiments, only the wish to grant a suitable shape. Bending and almost breaking the girl's limbs Frenhofer helps her to find a pose that will be more than mere sophisticated corporeal decoration. The goal is to discover a pose that will freeze in the function of expression. These activities at time resemble acts of refined sadism. The arrangement of a body in unusual shapes unambiguously brings to mind torture. The painter clearly hurts the girl but she, initially resisting, assumes the complicated poses, including those that result in physical and psychic exhaustion. All those inconveniences and physical struggles possess, however, a clearly delineated objective. Frenhofer expresses this unmistakably, turning to his model: *I'll break you to pieces... get you out of your carcass.*¹⁶ It would be difficult to express more lucidly the conviction that the truth about man does not lie on the surface nor is it contained within that, which is seen directly or better still: visible. On the contrary: it is *ex definitione* hidden and constitutes the reality, which it is necessary to disclose. The target is not accomplished by just undressing a person; no "naked truth" will emerge in this fashion. Evidently, this is not the point: here, nudity is not a synonym of truth, because clothes are not a simple form of concealment. After all, long-term contact with the model's nudity (both in the case of the painter and the spectator) demonstrates just how easily nakedness becomes a form of clothes. It is necessary to struggle for the sake of the truth by resorting to all available artistic methods. More: at this stage there is no mention of art or painting of any sort. The reason for this state of things lies in the fact that for the time being it is necessary to make certain cognitively fundamental discoveries so that the very process of painting a nude would have any meaning at all!

The truth about the portrayed person is not revealed by a certain extraordinary fragment, because it discloses itself within the phenomenon of the whole: *The whole body, not just some pieces... I want more. I want everything. The blood, the fire, the ice... All that's inside your body. I'll take it all. I'll get it out of you and*

put it into this frame. Here! In this blank. Like that. I'll get to know what's inside under your thin surface... I want the invisible. No, it's not that! I want... It's not me who wants... It's the line... the stroke.... Nobody knows what a stroke is. And I'm after it. Where am I going? To the sky? Why not? Why wouldn't a stroke burst the sky?

The painterly glance is not concerned with merely sliding on the surface. Nor does it focus on nudity or the bodily sheath as such. The target is total decomposition (naturally: formal) of the perceived body and its re-arrangement, but already in a different order: *No more breasts, no more stomach, no more thighs, no more buttocks! Whirlwinds! Galaxies, the ebb and the flow... Black holes! The original hubbub, have you never heard of it? That's what I always wanted from you. I'm going to crumble you, you're going to break up. We'll see what's left of you when you forget everything. Don't worry, you'll get it back if you still want it.* It is necessary, therefore, to cast aside the haphazard and the unnecessary and to leave only the essential form. It is requisite to break through the shell of appearance, that static illusion, which is the outcome of the habitual glance so as to discover the "centre" pulsating with life. Next – and this is the most difficult stage – to find suitable instruments in order to insert this stereoscope depth into the two dimensions of the flat canvas.

The whole time the painter's thought is organized by the opposition: surface and interior, outside and inside. In his eyes, truth is on the side of that, which is not given directly, i.e. the "interior" and "depth". The surface lies. Consequently, if the painting is to possess a cognitive asset then the painter's glance is to, first of all, resemble a detector and should be akin to an X-ray (*I want the invisible*). It is precisely this sort of sensitive perception that has a chance to extract from a static configuration its inherent potential, pulse, dynamic, emotions, in a word: life. Only then that, which is seen can be transposed into a differed dimension and render painted reality. Another noteworthy comment made by Frenhofer maintains that the painter controls the created work only to a certain degree. He intentionally produces a certain composition but at a given moment it starts to heed its own logic. Frenhofer probably had in mind the form created by the painter, which at a certain moment assumes strange autonomy and emanates some sort of an unclear but nonetheless absolutely real creative imperative. Not only is it impossible to oppose it, but, on the contrary, it is mandatory to succumb to this inner necessity. This is precisely the above-mentioned "entity", which definitely is not a simple sum of parts but a subtle quality built as if above them.

At an extremely interesting moment Frenhofer in an act of self-reflection reveals to Marianne the reason why years earlier he embarked upon a nude portrait of Liz: *Anyway, at first I wanted her, before wanting to paint*

her. This primeval impulse, which forces to paint, is known as desire. It was desire with its erotic sources that compelled him to render immobile a loved person in a painting, to keep her depiction for himself. We shall return to this essential motif, closely connected with Balzac's story. The same fragment of the artist's statement contains also a record of creative fever, a strongly metamorphosed but nonetheless credible description of work on a painting: *For the first time, I was scared. The fear became the driving force behind what I did. A change of speed, like a whirlwind. I became blind. A tactile painting. As if it were my fingers that saw and commanded themselves. That's what I'm looking for. That's what I want. Yes, that's it! It was then, maybe that I became a real painter.* The usually restrained Frenhofer speaks with open and unconcealed fascination and the described moments appear to bring not only creative fulfilment. More: he recalls those moments of the grace of seeing (how else should we call them?) and the gift of an intuitive certitude of painting with direct jealousy and hope that perhaps now he will be able to repeat them. He is right – something of the former outburst appears to reappear in his work with Marianne. The totally exhausted artist and model conduct a dialogue:

M: You're rotten..

F: I want nothing, I told you. It's the painting... You and I, we're just involved. It's going to be a whirlwind, a cataract, a maelstrom... Faster, faster. Until you see nothing, feel nothing. Your ears aren't buzzing?

M: I've no more ears, I can't feel my body.

F: Very well, neither can I. That's almost it... almost.

The afore-mentioned artificiality or theatrical character of those phrases does not eject the impression that the heart of the matter concerns something truly essential. First, let us mention the importance in the creative process of a thread linking the painter and the model. This observation would have been simply trivial if it were not supplemented by a remark about a mysterious, undefined "third element": that of the overwhelming reality in which they both participate, because apparently it is that reality, which bestows importance and meaning to painting. The cited dialogue is aware of the fact that the artist is not the only person responsible for the ultimate shape of the painting. It says all too vividly that in the course of purifying the vision transpiring on the canvas something happens to the depiction that evades all control. It seems that the painting takes over all initiative and that the artist can at best adapt himself to the trend of the solutions proposed by the canvas.

The painter-model configuration is a natural and outright exemplary variant of the relation of power and subjugation. Seemingly, in this configuration the

model is from the onset in a lost position. The gaze of the painter (and the man!) is a look “from above” and subjectivizes. Marianne says angrily to Frenhofer: *Stop pretending. As a cat in front of a bird.* But she does not give up so easily. During the exhausting scenes of posing the two are engaged in curious psychomachy, a struggle for domination whose objective is the taming of the shrew. The very act of painting has something of an appropriation of the painted object. From the very beginning this is perfectly understood by Liz, the most important of the Frenhofer models. She warns Marianne, but the latter ignores her words. After a while, Nicholas becomes aware of the ambiguous procedure. His jealousy is devoid of fear about eventual sexual exploitation but is based on rather apt intuition that by painting Marianne, Frenhofer is taking her from him in a much profounder sense of the word. He is seizing all of her, and this means not only her cosmically magnificent body but also that, which it conceals: her spiritual interior. In other words: everything, her whole heretofore life together with all its moments. How is this feasible? In one of the conversations Liz cites a certain commonly held conviction, namely, that at the moment of drowning a person sees a film of his whole life:

Is it really possible to capture a whole life... on the canvas of a painting? Just like that... with a few traces of paint?

It seems unbelievable. but actually this is what Frenhofer was searching for.

You mean this is something shameless?

Yes, that's it... shameless.

It's not the flesh that's shameless, it's not the nudity... It's something else.

Frenhofer's comprehension of painting envisages depriving the model of all her outer layers in a quest for those deepest concealed particles, reaching the lowest strata of intimacy, i.e. shamelessness. It would be difficult to find a better formulation of the thought that painting, in its innermost core, fulfils such a denuding, revelatory function. This is why Liz says that it would be best if Marianne did not see the completed work: *Frenhofer won't protect her.*

It is symptomatic that both when we read Balzac's story and while watching Rivette's film we focus constantly on the convoluted relations between art and life. One of the most important questions asks why did Frenhofer resign from further work on *La Belle Noiseuse* with Liz as the model. We have at our disposal two replies:

Painter: *Why didn't I continue? I'd have died of it. Or else, she would have.*

Model: *First he wanted to paint me because he loved me, and then because he loved me. He didn't want to paint me. It was me or painting, that's what he said.*

If the first statement is understood only in categories of physical destruction then I find the second more interesting. It clearly says that there exists a disjunction between art and life, a permanent tension. To devote oneself wholly to art, to execute a portrait of one's beloved means burying the object of one's admiration and passion. There is always a price to be paid. In the case of such a solution that, which we gain in art we lose in life. In the case of the opposite solution we shall lose as artists but turn out to be winners in life. Both those objectives – if I understood the parable correctly – cannot be implemented simultaneously. Aware of this, Frenhofer ceased painting because he feared that he would lose Liz once and for all.

But had he not actually lost her? The facts are harsh. From the moment when he agreed that Marianne should pose for the once abandoned painting Frenhofer lives in the orbit of two women. Once again let us stress: this is not erotic rivalry. That would be too simple. The issue at stake is art and thus life. Is this so difficult to understand? Here is a fragment of a dialogue conducted by Marianne and Frenhofer:

M: *Why did you abandon it?*

F: *Abandon what?*

M: *The old painting with Liz.*

F: *Why are you so interested? Liz is not you.*

M: *But it's that one... It's that painting you wanted to start again.*

F: *You can never start again....*

M: *Why me? It was Liz then...? What are you using me for? It's not me you wanted to paint, you said.*

F: *It's you and it isn't you. It's more than you. More of you than you can imagine. If the painting's true it will be you.*

M: *I don't get it.*

F: *Neither do I. All the better!*

This truly enigmatic exchange of opinions offers no clear-cut conclusions. Frenhofer seems to be somewhat evading an answer, although admittedly the very topic of the reflections makes it extremely difficult to propose concrete conceits. The problem remains: who will appear in the newly painted composition? Liz or Marianne? Or perhaps a third model, a hybrid of the two? What role does the young model play: is she the real subject of the composition or only an objective source of inspiration? Is it possible to replace the already depicted woman together with her characteristic traits and unique face by another body and face? And can that substitution of one woman by another be cognitively and ethically innocent? An angry conversation held by Liz and Frenhofer sheds some light on the question:

L: *But tell me something... Since when for one work in progress you have to destroy another one? An old one,*

O.K., abandoned, O.K., but there was my face there and I liked it. You had to wipe me out.

F: It's not you I wiped out.

L: What's the word for it? You replaced me, yes. You put some buttocks in place of my face...

F: I couldn't do it differently. I can't go on with the work if I keep recollections, regrets... I just had to do it. And believe it or not, it wasn't easy for me.

Earlier, Liz warned Marianne not to allow her face to be portrayed. Now we know why. She fears not only that the painting will deprive her of a part of her life but also expresses anxiety about a potential substitute. In the incomplete version of the painting Liz's face has been painted over and next to it the artist situated the body of Marianne seen from the back. At this particular moment relations between art and life, painting and existence are on knife's edge. Frenhofer does not perceive his gesture as something extraordinary and believes that by eradicating Liz from the painting he has merely opened space for a new world. By separating life from art he is certain that he has performed solely a gesture belonging to the domain of painting, while she, a believer in the permeability of the depiction and the person, is firmly convinced that by removing her from the painting he has also banished her from life. That he had betrayed their shared life for the sake of art. This muddle is symptomatic. Liz is clearly heartbroken by what she has seen. In a brief conversation with her husband she declares that she is no longer expecting anything and that her life has come to an end. She adds that when she saw him sleeping in the studio she thought that he had died, and she together with him. At night, she enters the studio and in silence looks at the finished painting. A moment later she picks up a paintbrush from the table and on the reverse of the canvas, on the wooden frame stretching it, she adds next to the inscription: "F. 90" her own silent commentary: a black cross. As if she were making it known that at the very moment when Frenhofer was capable of reanimating the painting he died in her eyes. The artist might have risen from the dead but he passed away as a person closest to her.

But what did Frenhofer actually paint? What was the appearance of the canvas for which the protagonists of the story and we, the viewers, waited so long? We shall never find out and we learn about the canvas only from the reactions of those looking at it. Marianne gazes for long, attentively, and then suddenly runs out of the atelier. We already know Liz's reaction. The young daughter of a house servant, whom Frenhofer treats as his confidante, also examines the canvas but her reaction (*What you've done is beautiful!*) does not explain everything. Much seems to indicate that the artist succeeded and finally executed a masterpiece. But apart from the mentioned persons no

one will ever see it. Having covered the painting with green fabric (a discreet allusion to Balzac¹⁷) he will wall it up in a niche in the studio. In its place Frenhofer executes a different work, subsequently sold to the dealer totally unaware of the exchange. Why was the canvas concealed from the eyes of strangers? Just as in the commentary on Balzac let us interrupt our tale of Rivette's film at this exciting point and once again return to the text in order to examine the mystery of the masterpiece, but now from the double literary-film perspective.

4.

Recall: in Balzac's story the outcome was a shocking *qui pro quo* brimming with consequences. First, Frenhofer for a long time did not permit anyone to come close to his *La Belle Noiseuse*. Later, having completed the transaction (body for body) he placed the painters in front of the, in his opinion, finished masterpiece but they reacted with surprise and negligence, maintaining that they did not see anything apart from chaos. Let us deliberate once again. What is painting for Frenhofer? Clearly, he is a supporter of a *sui generis* magical vision. His whole slightly insane project is clearly a continuation of the myth of Pygmalion.¹⁸ Just as the Greek sculptor wished to animate a girl carved in stone (and partly succeeded) so he too, with the aid of illusionistic tricks and technical secrets of rendering three-dimensional effects on canvas (*I have succeeded in reproducing Nature's roundness and relief on the flat surface of the canvas*), attempted to force the painted body to live. Showing his Catherine to fellow painters Frenhofer obviously mixed up assorted orders. He clearly reminded them that they were standing in the presence of a woman and not a painting. Meanwhile, his colleagues appear to have turned this directive around and perceive only the surface of a canvas covered with tangled lines.

Today, this confusion of levels appears to be unacceptable. Nonetheless, the question it conveys is reasonable. If a painting is unable to realise its promise of expressing what is real, if it is incapable of bringing the lifeless to life, then this means that painters do not possess the sort of power that they ascribe to themselves. What is the sense, therefore, of the process of painting if the only thing that we may hope for is looking at a flat lifeless canvas. It is precisely becoming aware of this painful impotence that, as Danto suggested, was the reason why Frenhofer burned his works and then died.¹⁹ He was unable to achieve a transformation of a painted woman into a living person. His observant colleagues made him aware of this frustrating circumstance. A truly thought-provoking act, never explained in the story. His failure also explains the reason why at a certain moment Catherine Lascaux ceased being his model. Danto wrote that

she died and the sole way of resurrecting her was *via* painting. Frenhofer was incapable of finishing his work because he was unable to bring her back to life. He perceived his achievements as a different sort of failure than the one noticed by Poussin and Probus. After some reflection, it could be suggested that Frenhofer's defeat was unavoidable due to the inner limitations of realism;²⁰ this was the period when modernism was on the verge of debuting. One simply has to note that the wall of paint intermixed with lines and a realistic fragment of a woman's foot was the first truly modernistic work of art!²¹

Danto supported the thesis that despite the failure of the painter deduced from reading Balzac *La Belle Noiseuse* can be regarded as a masterpiece. But how are we to understand the expression that it was "unknown"? Naturally, in 1612 it could have not been recognised as a modernistic masterpiece for obvious reasons. The very term did not exist and modernism was a question of the future. In what sense was it "unknown"? The reason lies in the fact that only a few could understand anything of what they managed to see. Within the context of the Balzac novel an unknown masterpiece is "unrecognised" and thus did not match the aesthetic paradigm of the epoch. Its boldness preceded the historical moment of its origin. Its time was yet to come. Even such excellent painters as Probus and Poussin were incapable of comprehending this since the Frenhofer masterpiece exceeded their cognitive habits and that to which they were accustomed. They were simply unprepared to accept the work.²² It seems that the great Frenho himself experienced difficulties in understanding that, which he had executed. Within the context of his concept of painting as theurgical art his canvas must have appeared as a serious mistake.

In the case of Rivette such drastic misunderstandings or artistic disappointments do not take place. The deluge is already behind us. No one, apparently, anticipates any longer, while fearing being charged with insanity, that a painting can suddenly come alive and no one mistakes the depicted image for the portrayed person. Nonetheless, the reality of the painting, and quite possibly the portrait in particular, still remains mysterious. We saw how Frenhofer also tried to steal the model's secret of her concealed intensity and to transfer this knowledge onto the canvas. This time, however, the issue does not pertain to the actual effects of such a gesture and remains totally in the domain of painterly form.²³ Does such a comprehension of the painting make it impossible, at least to a limited extent, to speak about "truth in painting"?²⁴ Is this the sort of truth that would not be conceived as simple (and indestructible) adequacy between the object and its depiction but would be located upon a level more subtle than mimesis? Why did Marianne flee in despair

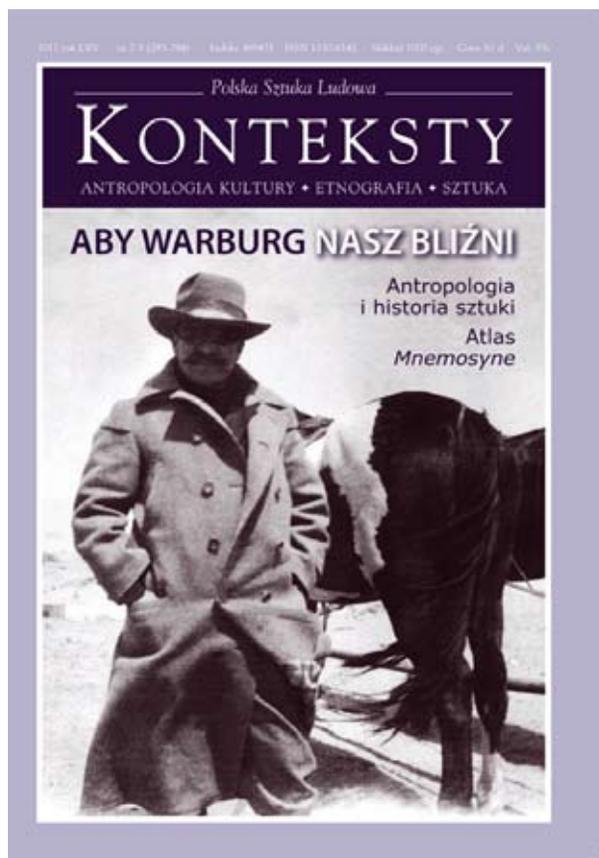
from Frenhofer's canvas? Because she saw herself! Not the mirror reflection that she was so familiar with. She perceived in the canvas some sort of an extremely real, previously unknown, hidden (from others and herself) particle. Reviewing the painting, she said: *A thing which was cold and dry. It was me*, and became afraid of the truth of such re-identification. Why did Frenhofer wall up his painting, thus echoing the gesture of his namesake from Balzac's story? In this case, the reasons were certainly quite different from those of the protagonist of *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*. It is quite possible that he had finally understood that he had committed a seriously inappropriate deed and noticed that the truth of the painting is much too cruel for the portrayed model. Or, well aware of the extent to which the canvas exceeds the aesthetic conventions of its epoch, he walled it up until the suitable moment would come when it would become possible to fully appreciate its artistry. More, he compared the painting to a child who needs time to grow up. To the public he leaves a conventional, smooth nude, keeping the reviewers convinced that this is his utmost attainment. Quite possibly these are not the only answers to the earlier posed questions. Rivette's greatness consists of the fact that he does not explain this, after all, most important puzzle to the very end.

Within this context it is just as important that on a certain interpretation level *La Belle Noiseuse* appears to be not only a film about a painting but also about the nature of the film medium. It can be easily deciphered as a self-thematic work, a study on the potential of film searching for the "truth" of reality; does film, inevitably "visible", render indelible only physical appearance and touch the phenomenal stratum or can it penetrate the skin of the visible? Hence the intended and controlled formal asceticism of Rivette's work as well as the fact that it is deprived of all aesthetic beauty and narrating tricks emulating "real life". The formal severity and theatricalisation of the message make it possible not only to take a close look at the Frenhofer painting but also at its nature within whose framework it appears. Balzac and Rivette produced two totally different masterpieces about the creation of a masterpiece. Everything has still not been said. After all, their nature means that they have much more to tell us than we are capable to say about them.

Endnotes

¹ The first version of the novel appeared in 1831 in the periodical "L'Artiste" (two parts in two successive issues) under the title: *Maitre Frenhofer*, and in the same year it was issued once again with slight changes and under a different title: *Catherine Lescaut, conte phantastique*. After successive retouching it was published in 1837 in vol. XVII of the collection: *Études philosophiques* as: *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, and in 1846 it was included into *La Comédie humaine*.

- ² Balzac's excellent familiarity with painting was noticed by the critics who indicated a number of possible sources of his knowledge, mentioning such names as Gautier and in particular Delacroix, cf. M. Gilman, *Balzac and Diderot: Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, "PMLA", no. 4, vol. 65: 1950, p. 644.
- ³ D. Ashton, *A Fable of Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkley 1991, p. 10. For relations between the depiction of nudity in Balzac's story and the problems experienced by Cézanne in connection with his *Grandes Baigneuses* see: J. Kear, "Frenhofer, c'est moi": *Cézanne's Nudes and Balzac's Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, "Cambridge Quarterly", no. 35(4):2006, pp. 345-60.
- ⁴ *Balthus, à contre-courant - entretiens avec Constanzo Constantini*, transl. J.M. Kłoczowski, Warszawa 2004, p. 146. On the margin, he also recalled within this context the name of Nicholas Poussin, his master (who in Balzac's fictional narration plays the role of a talented student) and characterised his painting. Upon this occasion he also mentioned that it was Poussin who inspired the "magnificent story" by Balzac. Just like Poussin, Frenhofer sought in art the absolute that should be the goal of every genuine painter.
- ⁵ Lovers of round numbers drew attention to the fact that this took place a hundred years after the publication of *Chef-d'œuvre inconnu*.
- ⁶ Apart from the writings used in this text cf., i.a. J.-L. Bouget, *Balzac et le pictural*, "The Romantic Review", no. 11: 1973, pp. 286-295, E. Gans, *Balzac's Unknowable Masterpiece and the Limits of the Classical Esthetic*, "MLN", no. 90 (4):1975, pp. 504-16, H. Shillony, *En marge du Chef-d'œuvre inconnu: Frenhofer, Appelle et David*, "L'Année balzacienne", no. 3: 1982, pp. 288-90, A. Goetz, *Frenhofer et les maîtres d'autrefois*, "L'Année balzacienne", no. 15: 1994, pp. 69-89.
- ⁷ D. Knight, *From Painting to Sculpture: Balzac, Pygmalion and the Secret of Relief in Sarrasine and The Unknown Masterpiece*, "Paragraph", no. 1, vol. 27: 2004, p. 79. Evidently, this remark did not stop the author from writing yet another analytical sketch about Balzac.
- ⁸ *La Belle Noiseuse*, directed by J. Rivette, screenplay by P. Bonitzer, Ch. Laurent, music I. Stravinsky, cast: Michel Piccoli, Emmanuelle Beart, Jane Birkin, Marianne Denicourt et al., 1991.
- ⁹ The Unknown Masterpiece by Honore Balzac, introduction by: Arthur C. Danto, translated from the French by Richard Howard, "New York Review of Books", 31 August 2000.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 8.
- ¹¹ G. Didi-Huberman drew attention that already the mysterious surname of Balzac's protagonist is connected with visibility. In addition, it resembles that of the German optician Joseph von Fraunhofer, the inventor of the spectroscope, who died only a few years before *Le chef-d'œuvre inconnu* was written; cf. G. Didi-Huberman, *La peinture incarnée*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1985, p. 35.
- ¹² H. de Balzac, *Nieznane arcydzieło*, transl. J. Rogoziński, Warszawa 1951, p. 13.
- ¹³ H. de Balzac, *Le chef-d'œuvre inconnu*, p. 154; I cite the text of Balzac's novel published as an appendix to G. Didi-Huberman's *La peinture incarnée*.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
- ¹⁶ Cited film lines.
- ¹⁷ *While Gillette's words sounded in Poussin's ears, Frenhofer drew a green serge covering over his Catherine...* (in the original: *une serge verte*).
- ¹⁸ Cf. Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 89. G. Didi-Huberman expands also another mythical track indicated in the text: Frenhofer-Orpheus sets off to the "infero of painting" following his Eurydice, *femme irréprochable*; G. Didi-Huberman, *op.cit.*, pp. 66-67.
- ¹⁹ Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
- ²⁰ In turn, G. Didi-Huberman maintained that Frenhofer's failure was that of the model of painting based on imitation: *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, transl. J.C. Goodman, Penn State Press, State College, 2004, p. 234.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Danto, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- ²³ I propose a general understanding of the conceit of the form as in the interpretation of its contents by Wiesław Juszczak; cf. W. Juszczak, *Zasłona w rajskie ptaki, albo o granicach „okresu powieści"*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 49-55.
- ²⁴ I intentionally mention the title of the study by Jacques Derrida, while resigning (due to insufficient space) from even the slightest attempts at referring to its theses: cf. J. Derrida, *Prawda w malarstwie*, transl. M. Kwietniewska, Gdańsk 2003.



To See the World. Ethnography *vis à vis* Film and Mass Culture

The FIFA World Cup is watched by millions of people all over the world. Concerts of pop stars attract tens of thousands of fans worldwide. *Rambo* entertained a mass audience in China, while the Chinese actor Bruce Lee became a major film icon in Europe and America. Jeans, Coca Cola, rock music think nothing of borders and are everywhere. Bond or Madonna are just two examples of well-known figures popular on a scale unimaginable in the world of serious high art. Naturally, this is the field of mass culture, one of the most characteristically modern phenomena analysed so often and from so many angles that, to quote Stefan Morawski, *it is impossible to recount even the most important reasoning*.¹

I believe that ethnography too can add to this vast group an interesting image of mass culture. As befits its nature ethnographic description will not be tempted to imitate or opt for comprehensive portrayal. Rather, it will aim at emphasising the most crucial points for a caricature and not a portrait, to use a metaphor devised by Ludwik Stomma. This is why an ethnographer should focus on the phenomenon itself, attempting to find the specific organising principle decisive for its external shape. Only after the main narrative threads of the discussed phenomenon are revealed along with a catalogue of protagonists and the qualities attributed to them that we can begin contemplating their sense and meaning. This is when one can transcend the interpreted phenomenon towards historical reality and refer to man's existential problems. Even then, however, it is best to adopt a distinct perspective. After all, we are examining mass culture from the inside by following its rules and truth. Such a description opposes the traditional perception of cultural phenomena that, to cite Ricoeur, falls victim to three illusions – the illusion of the source, the creator and the audience.² Now, a quick look at what these illusions consist of.

It is assumed that the meaning of a phenomenon can be comprehended by referring to the reality in which it was created, to its social, political and aesthetic determinants. Another type of genetic inter-

pretation involves linking the subject with its author. Consequently, his biography, plans and intentions are supposed to provide the foundation of comprehension. A phenomenon may be also explained by drawing attention to the audience. In this case it is not the cause but the effect that is the most important factor for formulating final conclusions. Cause-and-effect explanations are the most frequent method of treating mass culture.

I would like to use several standard examples to show how the three illusions hidden in the foundation of these popular strategies exert a decisive influence on the perception and assessment of mass culture. Only in this light will it be possible to evaluate the chance offered to ethnographic description, an opportunity inspired by an awareness of the traps that sociologists and art historians collectively fall into.

The works of Marshall McLuhan are an extreme but thus an instructive example of explanation *via* sources.³ McLuhan believed that to understand mass culture is to comprehend the meaning of electronic mass communication media since their emergence is to lead to a new quality of civilization. A global electronic village has replaced the galaxy of Gutenberg. The change is radical because it affects not only media but *de facto* has an even larger impact on the transmitted content. According to McLuhan the method of transmission becomes synonymous with its content – hence his classification of hot and cool media. Regardless of its content the meaning of a message is already determined by the way it is transmitted. This would mean that *Batman* is closer to Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* than to the comic book it was based on just because it is a motion picture.

Defending this conviction poses a difficult challenge. One can legitimately claim that the carrier is one of the factors shaping information. The thesis proposed by the Canadian philosopher, however, is certainly stronger by arguing that what has been manifested depends fundamentally on the media carrying the information. If this were actually true then it would be impossible to explain evident differences observed within the reality created by the same media. The division into mass and high culture would have to be considered absurd. After all, mass culture obviously exists above the divisions discussed by McLuhan. Figures characteristic for its world move freely from the movies to comic books, from literature to films, and exist simultaneously on the stage and in the press. To put it differently, Donald Duck is defined by a specific reality of mass imagination that must be respected by authors using all techniques. This is why *Batman*, *Dick Tracy* – contemporary films based on classic comic books – render old plots so faithfully, adhere to character profiles, and even try to evoke the atmosphere of the drawings.

Civilisational transformations – and mass media changes undoubtedly belong to this group – say little about the essence of mass culture. After all, an analysis of the mass media does not tell us why the products of American dream factories are watched all over the world contrary to their Soviet counterparts. Moreover, it will not explain the sources of the remarkable popularity of archaic forms, e.g. fables, or of characters from a totally different world, such as demons, ghosts, sorcerers and angels. Naturally, the views of the electronic village prophet are an extreme example of thinking in which the base (source) decides about the superstructure. It is impossible to uphold a conviction about a sole causative reason setting into motion an entire structure. Nevertheless, a more subtle form of this particular style of thinking remains highly widespread.

The number of factors influencing the reality from which mass culture emerged tends to grow. Urbanisation, industrialisation, mass education – these are the forces that together with the new media gave rise to the phenomenon in question.⁴ It is possible to present these processes in numbers and to express them in tables and charts, thus rendering them objectively perceptible and a better analysis foundation than the intuitive belief that print leads to a more fragmentary world perception and TV to a comprehensive grasp. The fact that the number of TV sets has increased considerably does not explain why *Dynasty* won a mass audience and *Seventeen Moments of Spring* did not. The expanding opportunity to transmit all types of contents does not account for the universal acceptance of some and the slender approval of others.

Why then do Indiana Jones, Madonna, soccer, Stephen King novels, or images of attractive buttocks and breasts get the upper hand, and not films by Tarkovsky, avant-garde music and scientific speculations? After all, the civilisational frames accompanying their creation are identical, and the transmission media – similar. And yet two opposite phenomena – mass and high culture – emerge on the very same ground. Surprisingly, while origin is supposed to entirely determine the former it does not seem to have a larger impact on the latter. Genetic explanations are not helpful in solving this mystery. An interpretation of mass culture based on its sources is not particularly productive. It shows why cultural contents can spread rapidly and widely but is incapable of pointing out the reasons why some take advantage of this opportunity while others fail to do so.

The explicit insufficiency of the above option calls for a backing. Therefore, the focus switches from sources to the audience. From the very beginning critical opinions relating to mass culture have been accompanied by an illusion pertaining to the audience, the conviction that the nature of mass culture

depends on the people who consume it. The reflections of Jose Ortega y Gasset, cited up to this day, are a classic expression of this concept.⁵ Gasset outlined a highly determined picture of the mass-man:

*The mass is the average man (...). The characteristic of the hour is that the commonplace mind, knowing itself to be commonplace, has the assurance to proclaim the rights of the commonplace and to impose them wherever it will. (...) This leads us to note down in our psychological chart of the mass-man of to-day two fundamental traits: the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards what has made possible the ease of his existence. These traits together make up the well-known psychology of the spoilt child. (...) That man is intellectually of the mass who in face of any problem is satisfied with thinking the first thing he finds in his head. (...) For the basic texture of their soul is wrought of hermetism and indocility; they are from birth deficient in the faculty of giving attention to what is outside themselves, be it fact or person. They will wish to follow someone, and they will be unable. They will want to listen, and will discover they are deaf. (...) Hence we apply the term mass to this kind of man – not because of his multitude as because of his inertia.*⁶

Primitive, lacking taste and morality, seeking exclusively consumption and amusement, desiring power but avoiding all types of responsibility, opposed to everything autonomous and different, the mass-man, whom the Spanish philosopher additionally linked with communism and fascism, poses a threat to all authentic values.⁷

Works by Ortega y Gasset do not consider the cultural environment of the mass-man but shift their focus from civilisational transformations straight to mental traits. And yet a definition of a representative of the masses also indirectly describes his culture. The principles of the homogenization of contents and the lowest common denominator apply only when it is possible to define the basic recipient. After all, it is he who sets the level of images aimed at mass imagination. Mass culture envisaged as the realisation of the needs of the average man is the key to understanding the phenomenon. Take a look at some examples.

Just as its name suggests mass culture is aimed at the masses of average consumers, everyman devoid of aesthetic culture or possessing it to a slight degree. (...) Mass culture is based on already worn out aesthetic and non-aesthetic stereotypes, on epigonic consciousness so obvious in popular belief that the discussed stereotypes seem to be eternal. (...) [Dominated by] mass-produced conventional commonplace values, with a definite aesthetic aura replaced by the climate of banality, something to be used and used up quickly, and no deliberate distinction; on the contrary, differences between an art product and everyday items are obliterated. On the one hand, appreciation for individuality, uniqueness, talent, genius, innovation, and originality,

together with the breaking of conventions and the questioning of stereotypes at the very least, and on the other hand, a longing for the stereotypical and the conventional; the epigonic approach does not offend and talent is not sought after contrary to accessibility, i.e. communicative contents and old, reliable communication forms.⁸

Mediocre people strive for mediocrity. This equation leaves no place for doubt. By opposing uniqueness the mass scale creates, on the one hand, horror of the “terrible bourgeois” and on the other hand – kitsch in art, banality and stereotypes in thinking, an apotheosis of passivity and consumption. This “aristocratic” perception is at its very basis entangled in assumptions that in advance determine description and assessment. There is no proof to support the view claiming that the original and the extraordinary are superior in any way to the common and the average. Ethnography shows that in “cold” or folk-type cultures we encounter a completely opposite situation. Well-known and traditional objects and behaviour are wise, beautiful, good, and desirable. Even in high European culture the extraordinary career of originality did not begin until Romanticism. Taking as granted the historical conviction that elitist means high, valuable, and significant, while commonplace is synonymous with low, banal, and degraded is to say that mass culture does not exist as a characteristic and original phenomenon. It is affected by special ethnocentrism, i.e. a process of measuring with reference standards treated as if they were universal and absolute. Cultures considered primitive were once perceived as first stages along a path leading to the culture of the West, but now mass culture is recognized as the latter’s infantile phase. The world of the elites is obviously supposed to be immersed in a strong, exemplary emanation of Western culture.

The time and space proximity of mass and high culture probably generates the method used to describe pop concerts, action films, or sports events. It consists of psychological identification and produces many attributes reflecting emotional states, e.g. pleasant, easy, carefree, or obvious. It may be also the reason for the lack of interest in contents creating this “little world”. They seem to be familiar and similar to a reproduction or an inferior copy do not require reflection.

Without granting mass culture a separate manner of existence we have to assume that quantitative and not qualitative differences are the only thing separating a researcher from a participant. Both experience in a similar way, albeit some less and others more consciously. By perceiving in the same way, though more acutely and extensively, it is possible to formulate binding opinions and define what is banal and childish and what is noble and creative. The imperfection of this manner of interpreting is perhaps most obvious upon the example of Ortega y Gasset’s predictions of

the future of societies dominated by mass culture. His prophesies of an imminent collapse turned out to be an obvious mistake in the light of the progressing mass-scale Americanization of the world. Ortega y Gasset also missed the mark when linking mass culture with fascism and communism. After all, democracy is at its strongest in a reality dominated by the blue jeans-style culture, whereas the worst examples of tyranny and barbarity are encountered wherever elites shaped the framework of life.

The history of film is yet another proof of misunderstandings caused by the recipient illusion.⁸ At its onset, film was plebeian, fairground entertainment created with the masses in mind. The same pictures that used to universally entertain and move, such as those with Chaplin, are now treated as significant artistic achievements. This career of elements creating Cosmos with Bond in the coat of arms is no longer unusual. Post-modern art readily applies quotes, techniques, and patterns derived from lowbrow culture. A vivid example of succumbing to illusions are attempts made by art historians maintaining that a work whose form and content are of a decisively mass origin, but which was created by a renowned artist and circulates within high art, is substantially different than the basis from which it originated. The reason supposedly lies in the awareness of the author and the audience as well as in the distance, irony, etc. assumed by both parties. The conviction that in order to understand a work of art it is more important to define the experiences of a concrete, historical audience than to analyse the work itself is embedded in precisely such beliefs. In this psychological reception the analysed phenomenon does not exist objectively but depends on the readers even though they continue to change and elapse while it continues to persist in the same shape. In other words, the recipient’s error inclines to absolutize a single perception and opinion. In mass culture such an illusion must be additionally intensified because it is difficult to define its consumers. This remarkably heterogeneous milieu includes representatives of the most diverse cultures, age groups, and professions, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate. Mass culture is their only common denominator, and the sole quality that we can attribute to them definitely is that they are numerous, a mass. If these designations are not treated from the vantage point of evaluation – by accepting assumptions determining a description but certainly not arising from it – but from the point of view of description then the fact that *Batman* was watched by millions and *The Sacrifice* by thousands will say nothing about their value and significance. Meanwhile, the view claiming that popularity is connected with shallowness and that the nutriment of the common man is bland says more about the image of the reality of those making such assumptions than about the phenomena

in the centre of their attention. In this instance, mass culture becomes a pretext to lecture on which values are important and which judgments are true, and is supposed to conceal confessions.

The author's illusion stays closely connected to the observation made *via* the audience. It was particularly favoured by critics of the Western consumption lifestyle and designers of *the socialist version of mass culture*.⁹ The belief that a text says what its author intended it to say constitutes the centre of this illusion. It is the author's intention that is supposed to decide about the meaning of a given work. If he knows how to win over the audience then he is also able to impose his views, assessments, and perception of reality. Such reasoning leads towards treating mass culture as a great tool of manipulation, a subtle device invisible for those that succumb to it. The American sociologist H.I. Schiller wrote in his symptomatically titled *Mind Managers: For manipulation to be most effective, evidence of its presence should be non-existent. When the manipulated believe things are the way they are naturally and inevitably, manipulation is successful. In short, manipulation requires a false reality that is a continuous denial of its existence*.¹⁰

According to Schiller, the qualities that make it possible to impose this false vision include lack of criticism, excessive value assigned to consumption, and belief in unchanging human nature.¹¹ All this corresponds well with the already discussed qualities of the average man, a consumption-starved citizen of a country dominated by poverty, violence, mawkishness, pandemonium, and puerile ditties. We should not blame, therefore, viewers of films made by Walt Disney Productions and readers of *National Geographic* (examples analysed by Schiller¹²), originating from precisely these circles, for not being able to perceive in such products American imperialism and activities consolidating the binding *status quo*. The inclination of the mass-man to succumb to manipulation is reinforced by the fact that certain sources of information making it possible to assess the actual situation belong to scarce elites distributing only certain beneficial images and not allowing others to be revealed. The commercial success of music, literature, and films originating in protest against existing reality seems to suggest quite the opposite. Exploiting the dark sides of existence, highlighting the disadvantages of the system, and emphasising injustice can be a good way to reach Batman aficionados, punk rockers, and football fans. After all, this world is full of figures representing all types of denominations, professions, convictions and skin colours, with the most contrasting opinions attributed to them. Indians can be depicted as good, noble and brave or terrifyingly despicable and cruel. Stories are told about good bandits, innocent prostitutes, corrupt policemen and the horrifying world of business. Natu-

rally, tales about the infernal evil forces of violence and superhuman good law enforcers also exist. In their perfidiousness the authors of popcorn entertainment went so far as to clad Arnold Schwarzenegger – a pop cinema star – in the uniform of a Soviet police officer, endow him with all suitable attributes, and show him battling the Soviet mafia together with American law enforcers in the USA. To make things even more perfidious this Soviet police functionary towers above his American colleagues and unmasks the incompetence of the local administration of justice. If Donald Duck is an apology of middle-class America then *Red Heat* must be praise of socialism and the USSR. After all, a search for the author's hidden intentions can lead to even such a risky thesis.

If one believes that it is the author who decides about the meaning of a work then there is nothing absurd in the conviction that after captivating the audience he will be capable of incapacitating it, and thus rendering it subordinate to the forces he serves or represents. If this were actually the case, if a work were not autonomous, then becoming commercially successful would be extremely simple. Familiarity with the preferences of the mass audience, and such familiarity is taken for granted, should make it easy to complete the author – communiqué – audience relation. However, this is not the case, as sufficiently proven by the frequent financial bombs of products developed for the mass audience. The already bygone history of the so-called socialist version of mass culture may be an even better example. When an author determines the message of a text he either surrenders to the audience's taste in order to become successful or tries to oppose the audience and impose his own project. The former approach supposedly dominated mass culture in capitalist countries. Those discussing mass culture in the socialist bloc believed that the latter attitude could win. After all, when authors do not depend on the market, mass culture could be applied for the purposes of social pedagogy. Having all the mass media and accommodating executors at their disposal, the leading forces in those states hoped to mould the "average man" any way they wanted. The result was rather mediocre. The success of the *Four Tank-men and a Dog* TV series and the adventures of Captain Kloss did not influence the attitude towards the prevailing system or intensify Polish-Soviet friendship. The upright characters of Party secretaries evoked laughter, as did the exploits of editor Maj, a Polish James Bond combating neo-fascists. Competing with its Western counterpart socialist mass culture was losing in all fields. Even though various enlightened forces were demonstrating in myriad ways how degrading it is to enjoy pop music, action films, fashion or gossip from the *grand monde*, consumption of this forbidden fruit was a favourite pastime from the Elbe to Vladi-

vostok. It became something more: as Tyrmand and Bukovsky emphasised in their memoirs, adherence to mass culture seemed to be a specific form of a battle for independence and the right to different opinions and tastes. It is difficult to assume that when writing their songs the Beatles anticipated that they would be used in a crusade against communism. It is also rather unlikely that designers of colourful socks intended to turn them into a weapon in the battle against a hostile system. And yet the phenomena in question gained precisely such connotations. This example demonstrates how each phenomenon applying the language of inter-subjectivity and using symbols reveals new and unexpected meanings in a novel historical and social context, meanings whose existence the author was unable to predict. Mass culture pointedly reveals that the horizon of a work goes infinitely beyond the intentions of its author. This is also one of the reasons why it does not have to concern itself with boundaries.

While describing how three interpretation illusions determine the shape of a presented image we obviously did not assume that transformations of civilisation, audience and author are insignificant for comprehending the phenomenon. A satisfactory presentation of mass culture, however, has to focus on culture itself; otherwise, the discussion merely concerns a new dimension of civilisation, mass audience, and authors working for its sake. To put it differently, other issues are being considered. After all, mass culture is predominantly synonymous with a collection of texts that have a mass audience. This is its core and true reality. The texts, recorded in various systems of signs, should be interpreted and only in the light of the knowledge contributed by this exegesis can we discuss the relation between mass culture and mass communication media, the reasons for this culture's universal acceptance and, finally, the traditions inspiring its authors. Critique of illusions is thus the starting point of an ethnographic description of mass culture, showing that its specific character does not involve civilisational conditions because they also give rise to opposing phenomena. Nor is it the mythical "mass-man", a theoretical construct whose pure form has never existed anywhere. Finally, it is impossible to characterise mass culture as the product of third-rate authors capable only of iterating well-worn models and enjoying commercial success by pandering to the public.

Once again: mass culture is a collection of texts that are, or used to be read on a mass scale. To participate in it is to read those texts and interpret them while discovering their meaning. Their world is entered only for the duration of reading and we stay in it only as long as we read. This is why it does not have any permanent residents and is inhabited by passers-by.

Childishness, banality, kitsch, and inauthenticity are some of the numerous designations attributed to

the phenomenon of interest to us. The assessments contained therein seem to be off the mark, but the intuition they share is unquestionably apt. It emphasises the chasm between mass culture and everyday "normal" life, a dissimilarity caused by a different form of existence. The extraordinary character of mass culture must be connected with its complete textuality. If the conviction maintaining that this is how the phenomenon actually exists is correct then the question of the structural homology of the texts creating it becomes crucial. Does the mass public, a factor making it possible to notice the existence of the phenomenon and determining its borders, have its fundamental counterpart within the texts? What are the mutual relations of the two denominators? These are the questions that an ethnographic description should answer. Its point of departure includes books, films, fashion, and concerts because it knows that this is where the meaning is hidden.

Endnotes

- ¹ S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie od sztuki do po-sztuki*, Kraków 1985, p. 89.
- ² P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 334-335.
- ³ M. McLuhan, *Wybór pism*, Warszawa 1975.
- ⁴ A good example is: A. Kłoskowska, *Kultura masowa*, Warszawa 1983.
- ⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *Bunt mas i inne pisma socjologiczne*, Warszawa 1982.
- ⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7, 13, 63, 69.
- ⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 82.
- ⁸ A. Jackiewicz, *Moja filмотeka*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 32-41.
- ⁹ For a review of the Polish authors of such concepts see: P. Kowalski, *Parterowy Olimp*, Wrocław 1988, pp. 7-60.
- ¹⁰ H.I. Schiller, *Sternicy świadomości*, Kraków 1976, p. 25.
- ¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 22-35.
- ¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 113-143.

Batman – a Story of Creation

It seems impossible to give a precise definition of mass culture whose origin and scope continue to be discussed¹. Especially now, in the age of postmodernism, books, films and music trends apparently intend to intensify the distinction between mass and high culture. Umberto Eco novels, David Lynch pictures, Sting music are just some of the examples of this wide current. Fortunately, some works can be easily classified and Tim Burton's *Batman* is among them. A perfect match for the mass culture category this commercially successful film was ranked third among the top-grossing American pictures of 1989 and can be treated as a standard element of a set, a representative of mass culture, as evidenced by the mass audience, electronic media, plot, character profile, and setting. Familiarity with all the qualities characterising the film does not mean that their sense has been exhausted. Watching events transpiring in Gotham City one must admit that comments about a stereotypical plot, a black-and-white distribution of values, and a lack of an in-depth psychological profile of the main characters are apt. New solutions, original tricks, and unfathomable situations are missing. Everyone understands the screen goings-on and as demonstrated by the box office viewers accept this straightforward form. The interpretation of these obvious observations, however, is far from evident and becomes such only if we accept the unquestionable nature of common verdicts about mass culture. In this light the discussed phenomenon can be seen as a field dominated by trivial entertainment based on stereotypes, banalities, and intellectual shortcuts accessible to everyone because it is subject to the rule of the lowest common denominator. Problems appear only when we perceive that all the above qualities can be evaluated in a number of ways. Amusement and entertainment do not have to be associated with indolent leisure. Ever since Huizinga's *Homo ludens* at the latest we know that ludic forms of man's activity have a deeper sense and that play and game possess surprising meanings². Similarly, the importance of stereotypes, unambiguity, and the use of continually the same clichés cannot be unambiguously prejudged. These traits are degrading only when originality determines the significance of the text. Cultures of the "ludic type", however, attached greatest value to a precise recreation of traditional patterns. In realities of this kind efforts made to attain duration and repeatability were the most obvious technique for accomplishing this state.³ Cultures representing the discussed category showed little esteem for change and innovation. One of the unquestionable successes of ethnography was demonstrating that, despite this attitude, other people were capable of living just as successfully as we do. In other words, otherness should not be in any way associated with inferiority.

Mass culture is most frequently treated as a lower form of elite culture and not as a separate and original world. The history of ethnography shows how the life

of the rural population, interpreted in a similar manner, generated inappropriate convictions about its style of thinking and experiencing. With all their differences these distant worlds have certain common elements. Being strata of the same Western culture and due to geographic, historical, and emotional proximity they seem to be easier to fathom. In both cases it is difficult to maintain a distance important for their interpretation. The Poleszuk and Hutsul peoples or the Tatra Mts. highlanders were once treated as "lesser brothers" but not as residents of another continent. Similarly, sports spectators, pop music fans and commercial cinema enthusiasts do not exist in a space of their own. This is why the reality of people roaring at stadiums, whirling in concert halls, or excitedly following the adventures of Bond and Batman is not a goal in its own right but only a means to comprehend such phenomena as manipulation, mass communication, kitsch, and degradation of high culture models. First and foremost, it is supposed to justify an essentially ideological thesis: the common is by its very nature inferior to the elitist, leading to highly important social consequences.⁴

We shall assume that a portrait of this kind is just one of possible depictions. An effort aimed at a different perspective will make it possible to treat mass culture in the manner of ethnography, i.e. by keeping a certain distance to our knowledge, predilections, and common sense. Let this phenomenon manifest itself in the manner of the culture of the Aboriginal Australians or the Eskimos. Finally, we should also treat such culture with the respect that we were able to muster for the others.

After this lengthy digression time to return to *Batman* and begin by breaking down its plot into significant components. Their formalisation will make it easier to reveal mutually binding relations, and once they are put back together – to emphasise the order of the whole story and its goal. Only equipped with this knowledge shall we be able to begin explaining its meaning.

The story of Batman starts with images of the city of Gotham. From a distant perspective we see a shape resembling a medieval stronghold rather than a modern

metropolis, extracted from darkness by light. This wide shot is once again used in the scene of Batman's final battle with the Joker in which Gotham City seems to be placed between the sky and the earth, with a contour similar to magic places from Disney films or tales about the wizard of Oz. Gothic, fantastic architecture will continue to accompany particularly important events. Such is the style of Batman's palace, the Joker's headquarters, and the cathedral, where decisive confrontations take place. We encounter, however, also a different picture of the city, a realistic imitation of an American agglomeration with all its dilapidation and tacky glitter. In other words, the whole film is set in two contradictory realms – fairy-tale and realistic.

A similar opposition dominates the characters appearing in the story. On the one hand, there are portraits of average people: officials, thieves, policemen, and journalists driven by everyday feelings of anger, jealousy, greed, love, and curiosity. Their qualities have a human dimension. The two lead protagonists are completely different, endowed with extraordinary talent and superhuman power. They do not contest for the sake of a concrete advantage but battle for the way in which the surrounding world is to exist. The dimension of the clash is thus cosmic and not human. The fact that they belong to a different category is emphasised in a multitude of ways. They have masks instead of faces, move in a unique manner, and their costumes, just as their abilities allow them to stand out from the rest of the crowd. This disparate ontological status is also underlined by their origin: in dramatic circumstances one metamorphoses into Batman and the second transforms from a gangster into the mad Joker. The names of the characters stress their mediatory nature. The way Batman and the Joker exist on the border of the twilight and fairytale zones makes it possible to shift the plot from one dimension to the other. Without this opening it would be impossible to solve the situation encountered in Gotham City, the site of a battle waged by two forces, neither of which is able to prevail. The appearance of superhuman powers is a consequence of this state of things, with Batman and the Joker representing the forces in question. Take a closer look at the two characters in an attempt at their definition. Batman is cloaked in black while the Joker wears the multi-hued clothes of a clown. The former flies, the latter prances. Batman is a brilliant inventor, and his nemesis – a remarkable chemist. The home of the former is bright and orderly, while the latter resides in gloomy clutter. One thing is obvious; the two opposites can reveal their meaning only in a mutual relation. The Joker creates Batman, who, in turn, is the main force making it possible for his adversary to rise to unequalled prominence. Opposing elements, after all, not only determine each other but also require the presence of the other. The fact that they compete for the same woman also acts as structural justification. Due

to their close connection everything within the range of the interests pursued by A must also attract B, his counterpart.

The film's plot begins with a sequence in which Batman becomes involved with one of the sides in a conflict raging in the city. Logically, the Joker soon appears, opts for the opposing party and the clash takes on a different dimension.

The whole story can be divided into three parts, the largest presenting the main characters. This exposition makes it possible to understand the causes and meaning of the duel between Batman and the Joker, which constitutes the second part. Finally, the last brief section portrays the city after Batman's victory. The bright daylight, the delighted faces of the people, and their declarations confirm the belief that evil and insanity have been defeated and if they were to return, HE, the great defender, shall return too. This scene is the complete opposite of the first sequences. Recall the darkness, chaos, violence, anxiety and fear that created the opening scenery of the whole story. If we describe the initial state as chaos and the final one as order (later we shall try to prove that there are good reasons to use these terms), then the whole event can be presented within a scheme of the rite of passage. Note that a lion's share of the film contained between the extreme states can be accurately characterised by referring to the middle phase of the rite of passage, i.e. transition. The extraordinary trials and tribulations experienced by the protagonists, the astonishing characters and powers, the different space-time are important for the phase of transition, a stage of trials that need to be overcome to achieve the desired new state. The structure of the rite of passage builds the film's narrative plan, and the logic of this event attributes qualities and functions to its characters. Although the procedure in question has affected the world of Gotham representing the whole reality-cosmos, it is portrayed by the battle waged by two symbolic characters, Batman and the Joker.

What do the characters dominating this motion picture symbolise? What truth does their conflict manifest, and what is its connection with the rite of passage? Before we start answering these questions we need to make a certain observation. The symbolic significance of any element is connected with its place in a structure and emerges from this location, which opens it up in a certain direction though it is impossible to say that meaning is unambiguously determined by a given place. The symbolic dimensions of Batman and the Joker are obvious. After all, they collect and magnify the features of their environment, reveal hidden truths, and overcome ordinary measures and conditions. These are the properties of a symbol.⁵ The mask acts as a detail continuously manifesting the other dimension of the main characters' existence. The mask is a means of stopping time and escaping the accidental and changeable. The

mask manifests the permanent and the unchangeable – the essence. Its presence signals a shift from the field of history and psychology into the realm of ontology.⁶ The path to this dimension followed by the cruel and cynical gangster Jack Napier leads through a vat of acid. In this terrifying welter a man dies and a mask – the Joker – is born. The acid that accompanies the transformation is deeply meaningful. According to M. Lurker in his *Dictionary of Biblical Images and Symbols: The effect of acid (...) became a symbol of impinging – particularly evil – upon the surroundings.*⁷ In other words, right before our eyes the human evil of Napier was etched into pure evil, with the Joker becoming its carrier. His character and actions represent the very essence of evil.

The name is our first hint: a joker tells or plays jokes; a joker is also a playing card that can replace any other card. He exists outside the accepted order, which he scorns. Gaudy clothing, clownish gestures, dancing and music are signs of a carnival, a reality of confusion, toppled hierarchies, and incessant changes. As befits a representative of the carnival the Joker is always play-acting, pretending, emphasising the conventional and impermanent character of all order. All his efforts are aimed at multiplying the absurd. Smylex is the name of his weapon, a bizarre gas that makes people abandon their character and, rendering them absurd, reveal the equally absurd nature of reality. The headquarters of the demonic jokester are an abandoned chemical plant, where various colours, smoke, and shapes mix. This is exactly the way in which the seat of the madcap king of the carnival, opposing everything that is simple, distinctive and defined, should look. The Joker utters the same truth in a variety of ways. The essence of evil is chaos, which has to end in death, non-existence. This is why the victims of Smylex die smiling and the entire Gotham population is supposed to perish in a culmination of carnival frenzy.

Only another force can successfully oppose the power of entropy and nothingness, and Batman is its carrier. Similarly to his antagonist he too experienced initiation in the face of death changing the ontological dimension of his existence. Hence the mask in which he appears at all the more important moments. As in the case of the Joker his name draws us closer to the secret of his power. Batman is literally a bat-man but also the one who serves. The ability to fly and the night (bat qualities) are prominently displayed. The protagonist, cloaked in uniform black, descends from the sky and disappears into an abyss.

The symbolism of bird qualities – flight and wing – is extensive⁸ and almost always related to spirituality and mediatoriness. The meaning of Batman's bird-like features becomes clearer thanks to the relation with the Joker. The latter sticks to the ground, slithers (his moves are highly characteristic), is colourful and changeable, and kills with poison, venom. In a word – a snake, a

great chthonic symbol. The fact that he multiplies chaos is connected with his bond with the earth that contains everything but in which nothing has yet been crystallised. A battle between a bird and a snake is a frequent medley of symbols, with the serpent representing the subterranean world, the earth, and evil, and the bird – the sky, air, and goodness.⁹ What is the principle of goodness represented by Batman? A bat and blackness usually reveal night, unhappiness and death. Nevertheless, they can also symbolise a severe, ceremonial and lofty order contrasting with the one in which we exist.¹⁰ The blackness of Batman's costume and its unchangeable and uniform character become meaningful only in the context of his enemy's outfit. The latter denotes changeability and chaos, and the former – duration and clarity. Obviousness and loyalty also distinguish the relations between Batman and people. His friendship with an old valet is unquestionable and his love survives all tests. As befits a winged creature he features considerable intelligence and numerous talents, which inspire the creation of precise constructions and devices. Batman is building a well-ordered, clear space. The objects he uses are nothing more than materialised order, also represented by good manners and elegance. Our protagonist destroys the criminal world because by breaking the law the latter subverts the constancy of order – the essence of goodness. In other words, Batman's activity in all fields can be reduced to a common denominator: he creates, intensifies, defends and expresses order. Batman himself is order, just like the Joker is chaos.

Two forces confront each other in Gotham. Evil-impermanence-chaos-death, on the one hand, and goodness-loyalty-order-life, on the other hand. It is worth noting that the opposing nature of the characters symbolising these states does not exclude their considerable closeness. They share the feat of crossing the boundaries of human measures and possessing powers not of this world. Batman and the Joker do not serve the sides involved in the Gotham-set conflict but rather represent the cosmic dimension of the clash. The scope of their duel is emphasised by corresponding time and place. The final, decisive round is staged on a tower summit in the course of festivities. A cosmic confrontation occurs during a fiesta, when everything simultaneously dies and is born, and in a place linking heaven, earth and netherworld. Once again chaos, aiming at domination, falls into an abyss. Order, i.e. existence, triumphs.

The presented story emulates an obvious example and *via* the scheme of a magical fairy tale it refers to the heroic myth. The tale about a hero saving the world is a version of the cosmogonic myth, the core of every mythology.¹¹ The connection between this sacred story and the rite of passage discernible in *Batman* is also intentional. Each *rite de passage* is a revival of creation, the latter's update. The rite uses a different language to present the same truth, which evokes myth. An analysis

of the text emphasises its connections with categories revealed predominantly in archaic cultures, in tribal, peasant, and primitive communities. Within this context it is worth recalling the opinion of Aleksander Jackiewicz who described film as tribal art ingesting myths, opened to a fairytale-like quality and to a child-like experience of the world.¹² As we have tried to show, the tropes described by the author of *Moja filmoteka* are remarkably prominent in *Batman*. It must be emphasised that despite all its advantages our example is far from unique. It is a splendidly crafted but typical sample of the action genre. Once again we are presented with a plot shown a thousand times before by using different images. Knights, cowboys, policemen, solitary saviours continue to bring up to date the ever identical scheme and recall a model that we already know by heart. The collection of texts creating the action film speaks to us about the presence of archaic phenomena and forms seemingly inappropriate for modern times. The endurance, attraction, and vitality of films founded on these old, unoriginal topics, the incessant popularity of worn out clichés incline us to believe that the stratum containing such phenomena continues to be alive and important for contemporary man. In folk cultures the cosmogonic myth, rites, power, order, and chaos were situated at the level of real, strong life, which everyday existence should imitate. This was a sacred area making it possible to understand the course of all affairs. It was not distinguished from everyday life because it encompassed it in its entirety. Everything that exists at the bottom was also represented high above. This is precisely the property of the sacral way of experiencing existence that Ricoeur discussed as the rule of suitability.¹³ Myth and ritual are techniques making possible transference to a sacral and lofty realm. History and psychology become abolished, because “at that time” only figures and archetypes act and all events are model-like. Film is another technique for halting the ordinary course of events. Darkness falls and we find ourselves at the beginning of a story. As in myths, the protagonists are strong, beautiful and good, and evil is terrifying and powerful. As in myths, truths are distinct and principles are divided, time is governed by different rules, and individual qualities are a function of the tasks that the *dramatis personae* have to implement. Indeed, stereotypes, repetitions, unbelievable plots, and unrealistic characters dominate popular movies. True - normal life and ordinary issues do not exist and challenging intellectual deliberations are absent... Instead, an exceptionally important revelation has been offered. Power, order, meaning – *haute monde* – do exist and last. Look for them and pursue them. Transcendence, in other words, the *sacrum* can be perceived and experienced. This is the sole certainty granted by frivolous film. Powerful, exemplary, truly sacred life does exist. If religion denotes predominantly contact with sacredness and the latter reveals itself through power and overcom-

ing, then mass culture has a religious dimension. The word “religion” may come from the Latin *relegere* – to frequently address, to scrupulously contemplate, to read again, *religari* – to become attached, *religere* – to choose again. Does mass culture not entail great attachment, confirmed choice and intense contacts? Do sports fans and film and music enthusiasts not display this religious attitude? The answer seems to be obvious. Mass culture continues to persistently confirm the presence of the sacred. Its theology is not particularly sophisticated and ends with the statement – t h i s i s. However banal such truth may be it is also highly comforting and necessary. Recall – we are dealing with a text. It is difficult to say whether it is understood in this way. More important, the text makes this sort of reception possible and opens to such truths as well. The horizon of its meanings includes also this noble and magnificent dimension.

Endnotes

- ¹ J. Naremore, P. Brantlinger, *Introduction: Six Artistic Cultures*, in: *Modernity and Mass Culture*, ed. J. Naremore, P. Brantlinger, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1981, pp. 1-9.
- ² J. Woźniakowski also discusses reflections concerning the meaning of play in culture: *Czy kultura jest do zbawienia koniecznie potrzebna*, Kraków 1988, pp. 215-235.
- ³ This issue has been tackled by, e.g. L. Stomma, *Antropologia kultury wsi polskiej*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 13-151.
- ⁴ On the “aristocratic” criticism of mass culture, its origins and the present-day condition see: S. Barańczak, *Słowo-perswazja-kultura masowa*, “Twórczość” 1975 no. 7.
- ⁵ After: P. Tillich, *Znaczenie i usprawiedliwienie symboli religijnych*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, 1988, no. 3, p. 160.
- ⁶ This significance of the mask is particularly emphasised by: G. van der Leeuw, *Święta gra*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa”, 1991, no. 3-4, p. 6.
- ⁷ M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli bibijnych*, Poznań 1989, p. 106.
- ⁸ Information on this topic after: D. Forster, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, Warszawa 1990, p. 225; W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 342-344, 383-385.
- ⁹ W. Kopaliński, op. cit., p. 344.
- ¹⁰ W. Kopaliński, op. cit., p. 255, 53-54. D. Forster, op. cit., p. 117.
- ¹¹ Based on: M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 403-406; E. Mielecinski, *Poetyka mitu*, Warszawa 1981, pp. 280-285.
- ¹² A. Jackiewicz, *Moja filmoteka*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 223-327.
- ¹³ P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka*, Warszawa 1985, p. 365.

After the story of Batman and his enemies has been “alive” several years in collective consciousness it would be a truism to say that Tim Burton’s film version of the novel by Craig Shaw Gardner is a genuine fairytale about the struggle between good and evil as well as an up-to-date myth of the creation of the world in a carnival setting. The forces of good (albeit not consecrated by human, and thus highly imperfect, law) incessantly battle the forces of evil straight out of the infernal abyss. The latter are personified by the Joker, who emerges from an acid vat, and in *Batman Returns* – by Penguin, who lives in city sewers and canals. *Batman* – a work of popular culture from beginning to end – is full of mythological meanings, with all elements of its landscape and characters carrying a symbolic sense, starting with the name of the town in which the action takes place.

“Gotham” is a city cursed by God. A grim town where crime and sin reign; a city that lives by night in sordid bars, tattoo parlours, and porn movie theatres, full of dark alleys with lurking evil that men are helpless against. Years ago, on a hot and sultry night, destiny brought Bruce Wayne (future Batman) and Jack Napier (the future Joker) together in such a filthy backstreet. By murdering Bruce’s parents, Napier unwittingly creates Batman.

Burton’s film employs masks in the manner of the Japanese theatre. The Batman mask is black, and the Joker’s – particoloured, as if reversing conventional colour associations, which discern evil in black and tacky circus cheerfulness in the clown’s medley of colours. Moreover, there are three reasons why the Joker’s vibrant mask seems to be decisively more interesting than the black mask of his opponent: aesthetics, acting (Nicholson as the madman) and anthropology. It is the seemingly unambiguous assortment of colours, the Joker’s dance-like moves, and his face-mask with a frozen smile that hold the key to understanding this *dramatis persona* by referring to diverse symbolic connotations of the figure of the jester. In other words, the Joker’s mask seems to have many more anthropological meanings than the Batman mask. Now, take a closer look and try to see what is concealed under the mask.

Masca ridens

Years later, Jack Napier is the right hand of Grissom, the man in charge of Gotham on whom both the law and Batman declared war. Grissom regards Jack as inconvenient, albeit for different reasons, and decides to get rid of him using police action at the Axis Chemicals Company as a pretext. Surrounded by police functionaries and cornered by Batman, Napier does not discover the set-up until it is too late. A fight with Batman ends with Jack falling into a great vat of acid. This is how the Joker is born.

What’s Under the Mask. On the Motif of the Man Who Laughs: Several Remarks on *Batman*

Strictly speaking, the Joker comes to life in the illegal office of Dr. Davis, where he can hide all his shady dealings and illicit business from the prying police. This is where Dr. Davis – with the precision of a true *comprachico* – transforms Jack into the Joker, where the Joker’s new face-mask, *masca ridens*, is created by a present-day apprentice of the old art of disfiguring human bodies. A new Man Who Laughs is born – another embodiment of characters with a long and rich tradition, Victor Hugo granting it the best-known literary shape in his novel *The Man Who Laughs*.

The French author described the identity of the *comprachicos*, or *comprapequenos* as they were sometimes known: *They were a hideous and nondescript association of wanderers, famous in the 17th century, forgotten in the 18th, unheard of in the 19th.*¹ For the amusement of the populace and kings the *comprachico* artists produced a permanent grin on the faces of purchased children, twisted their bodies into bizarre shapes, and disfigured their skulls, in this way creating dwarfs, jesters and all sorts of human monsters. Gwynplaine, the protagonist of Hugo’s novel, is also a victim of this “pseudo-surgery” whose outcome is a “masterpiece in retrogression”, a perfect parody of God’s creation. The dealings of *Batman*’s Dr. Davis are just as shady as those of the *comprachicos* in the period described by Hugo. *I’m laughing only on the outside / My smile is just skin deep / If you could see inside I’m really crying / You might join me for a weep*, says the Joker, and the same words could also come out of the mouth of Gwynplaine and the very similar protagonist of J.D. Salinger’s short story *The Laughing Man*. After all, the character of Canio from Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* with his famous aria: *Put on the Costume*, the ill-fated Professor Unrat from *The Blue Angel*, the protagonist of Thomas Mann’s *Lou Lou* and many others forced to wear the mask of a broadly smiling clown, which turns into their authentic face and with which they die, can also be recognised as a distant metaphorical transposition of this motif.

Back to the Joker, now with a perpetual smile on his face or rather a smiling grimace. The mask of a

clown has become his face. He must put a lot of effort while putting on makeup to render chalk-white skin and yellow hair the colour of a normal human being. Focus for a minute on the motif of the wide-open laughing mouth responsible for the grotesque features of the Man Who Laughs and placing him in the realm of carnival reality. Mikhail Bakhtin saw the wide “gaping” mouth as an *open gate leading downwards into the bodily underworld* (...). *This gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, the most ancient symbol of death and destruction.*² Bakhtin also drew attention to the link between the smiling mask of a clown and the mask of a devil:

(...) *the mouth (...the teeth and the gullet). These are some of the central images of the popular-festive system. The exaggeration of the mouth is the fundamental traditional method of rendering external comic features, as pictured by comic masks, various “gay monsters” (...) devils in diableries, and Lucifer himself.*³ In other words, if we are to believe Bakhtin, the motif of an open, laughing, and glaringly enlarged mouth has to inspire associations with the motif of carnival death, and in the subtext of the clownish face-mask of the Man Who Laughs we should always see – following the rules of the symbolic world – the grotesquely contorted face of a representative of the netherworld, even if in an amusing version.

Murderous clown

I did not know bats came out in the daytime, the Joker cries out to Batman. *Just when murderous clowns leave the circus*, Batman replies. The Joker’s mask conceals, in addition to declared anguish and sorrow, also contents referring to the significant cultural motif of the sinister clown, the image of a jester conceived as personified evil and a harbinger of death. The motif of the murderous clown, popular in the literature and films of mass culture, has a tradition of its own. According to W. Willeford⁴ the connection between jester/clown and death is not limited to the fact that this particular *dramatis persona* becomes the victim of a comic murder committed on stage (after which he is immediately resurrected, confirming the existence of a symbolic connection between the character of the jester and immortality). A jester is also someone who dispenses death, who nonchalantly distributes it, a supreme judge *à rebours* who passes final sentences and avenges injustice. As an ominous killer-avenger the jester is a figure of chaos, anarchy, and destruction toppling all sanctioned order; he is a reversal of the figure of God and His earthly representative, the king. Such was the titular character of P. Lagerkvist’s *The Dwarf* or Barkilphedro, the evil jester, in *The Man Who Laughs*. Hop-Frog from E.A. Poe’s short story is another punisher. Among modern examples mention is due, without searching too long, to Penguin in *Bat-*

man Returns, the legendary “man from the sewers” and boss of the criminal Red Triangle Circus Gang that operates only at night. In *It*, a novel by Stephen King adapted by Tommy Lee Wallace into a movie under the same title, evil inhabiting the city is personified by a circus clown with orange hair and a bright red and broadly smiling mouth, carrying a bunch of colourful balloons. Alex, the character in A. Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange*, whose film version was directed by Stanley Kubrick, also kills while wearing the mask of a circus clown and moves, similar to Joker, as if he were prancing.

The motifs to which the substance concealed by the Joker’s *masca ridens* refers – the image of a jester as a figure of evil, mayhem, and ruin, together with the motif of his connection with death, resembling the relationship between the figure of the jester/clown and the demonic forces of the netherworld – are all worthy of a separate analysis. Here, I managed to sketch a pertinent outline.

Commence au Festival! or fragments of the myth of creation

Time for a deeper glance under the mask and for a search for the next stratum of the myth. The very essence of the activities of the Joker-the murderous clown involves staging a carnival, taking the world back to a state of the primal chaos that preceded its creation. Now begins the proper battle between Batman and his nemesis; a battle for the new order, which Batman ultimately wins. At this stage, without delving into the future, we shall remain in the carnival phase to analyse the nature of Joker’s demiurgic deeds.

A creation himself, the Joker keeps on creating. Thanks to a product known as Smylex he makes new People Who Laugh; they are born and die at the same moment, but with a smile on their faces. He has merely replaced the craft of the *comprachicos* with advanced chemistry.

The carnival of death continues. The city, in its festive debauchery, becomes immersed in crime and anarchy; death, as if in a condensed memory of all plagues, coincides with laughter. It is finally time for the Joker’s parade, when he appoints himself the new founding father of the city, which at that very moment becomes *imago mundi*, a symbolic image of the world. Spotlights are arranged on stage, followed by enormous deadly Smylex-filled balloons and, finally, a platform featuring a throne. *I am prepared to rule the world*, cries the Joker, a world that after that night was supposed to never stop laughing. A moment later the sky becomes filled with swirling dollar bills, millions of dollars, the greatest abundance the city has ever experienced. Gotham succumbs to chaos. New times are ahead.

Let us repeat: for all cultural anthropologists, everyone interested in myths, it is clear that the carnival

fashioned by the Joker – a riot of lights, debauchery, anarchy, laughter and death – symbolically reverts the world to the time of its beginnings, after which a new order, a new creation has to follow.

What precisely is this creation? The Joker, with Luciferian pride, dreams about divine prerogatives, which deprive all his gestures of meaning and render them mere parodies of God's demiurgic gestures. After all, the Man Who Laughs is nothing more than a parody of God's creation. *It was quite a science – what one can image as the antithesis of orthopedy*, wrote Hugo. *Where God had put a look, their art put a squint; where God had made harmony, they made discord; where God had made the perfect picture, they re-established the sketch.*⁵ What kind of demiurgic creation is this supposed to be if an unsuccessful, grotesque “sketch” becomes the demiurge? The demiurgic powers of the Joker, a monstrous masterpiece in retrogression, as the French writer called this form of creation, would be creation *à rebours* and his every creative gesture – a parody of creation. A characteristic quality of the clownish dissonance of Batman's opponent, expressed primarily by his gaudy attire and deformed features, also involves an element of “curvature” present in the very etymology of the term “jester” in Indo-European languages. Obviously the figure of the jester is connected with the motif of straying, erring, lunacy, temptation, traversing the wrong paths along the by-ways of truth, norms, and rules. By way of contrast, in the myth of the ruler as a demiurge the particularly striking motif is that of simplicity conceived as the foundation of both physical and ethical order. After all, it was not without reason that when discussing how Peter I designed his town Josif Brodski drew attention to the fact that the English word “ruler” describes both a person who governs and a tool used for measuring and drawing straight lines. Rulers, as God's appointed on Earth, always create by using straight lines. The demiurgic creation of a clown, on the other hand, is a derivative of shadiness, lies, and perfidy; in the sphere of symbols it is synonymous with losing one's way. Krzysztof Dorosz, following the example of Denis de Rougement, described such creation steered by the urge to gain divine prerogatives as: *a metaphysical “shortcut” on the road to divinity.*⁶ It is common knowledge that those who take short cuts usually get lost.

At this point we should move on to the last mythical theme found under the Joker's mask; the Prometheus myth, whose distant transposition is to be discovered in the story of the Man Who Laughs.

The Joker as Prometheus

The drama of divine creation has always included attempts at bringing down the established order, and members of this *enormous opposition*, to quote Maria Janion, i.e. Prometheus, Tantalus, Ixion, and Sisyphus

in Greek culture or fallen angels in the Cabalistic tradition often appear to be civilisers. Nevertheless, only in the ancient account – in the lost ending of Aeschylus' tragedy and in Hesiod – did the Prometheus myth feature a final reconciliation between the hero and the gods. In all cases, attempts at demiurgic creation after creation, even if inspired by the welfare of humanity, generate a mythological scenario of questioning divine decrees; at a certain level this is a scenario analogous to the one of *Batman*, a contemporary mythical tale of creation. Even if the wellbeing of men, cited both by Prometheus and fallen angels to justify their actions (*There is a surprising similarity between rebellious angels and Prometheus, the Greek contester of the gods*⁷), is a relative concept, the Joker's ironic declarations are even more dubious. In his essay: *Faust współczesny czyli de pacto hominis politici cum diabolo*, Krzysztof Dorosz situated the Prometheus myth among the sources of the myth of Faust – from the Renaissance Faust, who sold his soul to the devil, to the contemporary Faust, the social activist in communist mythology. *The humanistic Marxist myth does not leave any doubts about the saviour-like powers of the Greek titan. From a Christian perspective, on the other hand, Prometheus has to be ultimately considered some sort of a fallen angel and not a saviour.*⁸ In other words, regardless of his intentions Prometheus becomes a usurper trying to breach gods' contract with humans. Similarly to rebellious angels – and the Joker – he personifies the mythological figure of the Enemy. The pride and disobedience of the fallen angels were punished by locking them within a circle of darkness, chaining them to a black mountain, and pronouncing eternal damnation. Prometheus was sentenced to being chained to a rock in the Caucasus and finally, as in Kafka's short story, to merging with the rock, forgotten and losing the very reason for his existence. Salinger's Laughing Man dies in a comparable way, tied with barbed wire to a tree, while the Joker – another fallen angel – ends his life after one more fall.

The fire stolen from the gods by the Greek hero is essentially the same as the teachings passed on to men by archons: the manufacture of gold and silver artefacts, knowledge about stars and the moon, the art of predicting the future; it is thus identical to the ironic promise of eternal happiness and smile made by the Joker to the residents of Gotham. Denis de Rougement called these gifts and promises a *“short-cut” on the road to divinity*, inspired by the desire to equal the gods and idolize man. According to Dorosz, *this is why fire stolen from the gods, the apple picked from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the mystery of creation seized by the fallen angels in a Cabalistic legend, the Tower of Babel and the magic revealed by Faust in return for renouncing faith are all examples of a metaphysical utopia, a perpetually repeated attempt at circumventing the human condi-*

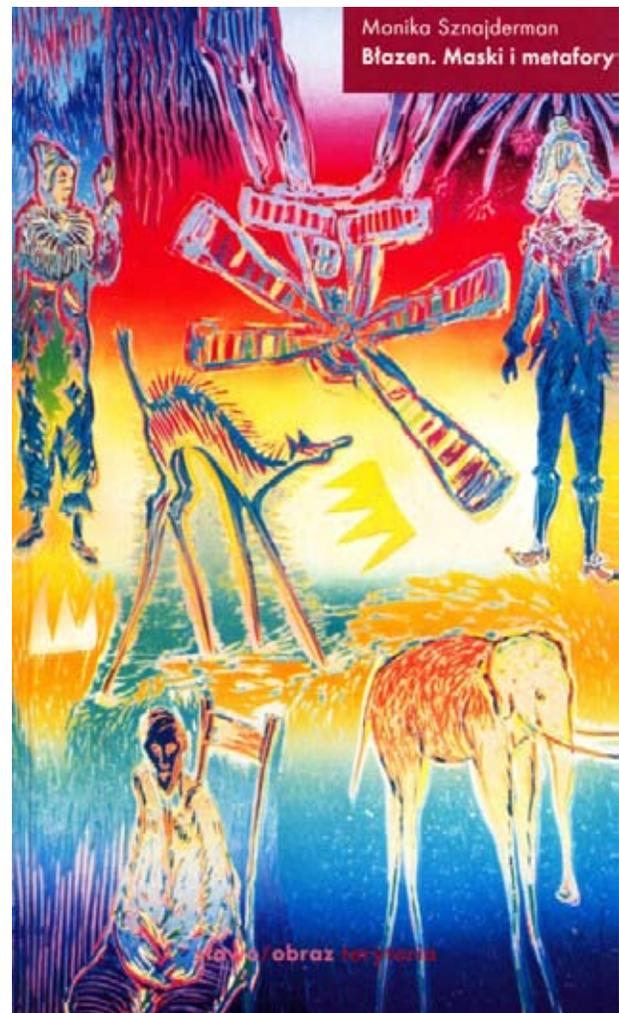
tion, storming the heavens and taking possession of God. It follows from our reasoning that such an endeavour cannot succeed without the help of demonic forces providing man with a specific means of elevation – magic.⁹ The Promethean fire, Dorosz concluded, is an attribute of *homo magus* and not of Providence, while black magic, the attribute of both the Greek hero and the fallen angels from the *Book of Enoch*, is the prevailing feature and mechanism of Promethean and angelic gifts intended or mankind. Dorosz believes that the rebellious black magic practitioners from Atlantis can be the acknowledged prototype of Prometheus, whose descendant is the Renaissance figure of Doctor Faustus, whose story brought forth the pact with the dark forces, implicate included in the Prometheus myth.¹⁰ *Homo magus*, a contemporary alchemist – how else would you describe the Joker, the chemist-inventor, whose amazing products are to make people die smiling and guarantee him the highest, divine prerogatives in this paradise à rebours?

To avoid rendering references to the Prometheus myth overly arbitrary here is a fragment of Maria Janion's reflections on Gwynplaine. In the essay: *Maska Maski. Ontologiczne nieszczęście Człowieka Śmiechu* she too compared the protagonist of Hugo's novel to the Greek titan. He is – in the symbolical sphere of the novel – a titanic figure, a fallen giant, a God of not what is above but what is below, a God of the abyss of poverty.¹¹ Naturally, there are certain differences. Contrary to the Joker, Gwynplaine is good and feels authentic pain under his mask-face of a Monster. His face disguises (or rather expresses) suffering, while the Joker's smile reveals madness and evil. Nevertheless, remaining, as Janion did, at the symbolic level of the film and novel, the Joker – in all his monstrosity – also has to be considered God's creature in reverse, the reverse of beauty and, taking into consideration his Luciferian intentions, the reverse of God. Since the Prometheus myth is extensive, ambiguous and interpreted in different ways it should not come as a surprise that various aspects may be stressed when comparing it to the myth of the Man Who Laughs. Janion emphasised the titanic character of Gwynplaine branded with the suffering of horrible ugliness,¹² his fate that of a cursed creature. The link between Prometheus, his distant descendant, Faustus, and the Joker – the feature in the latter's story that makes it possible to hear the distant echoes of the Prometheus myth, is predominantly their opposition against the order sanctioned by God and straying, taking a mistaken "shortcut" on the path to divinity, reflecting the negation of an established canon of values. The second tie is contact with the dark forces (to which the clownish demonology of the Joker *persona dramatis* acts as a symbolic key) and the application of magic (or science in service of magic) for the purpose of creating a new order, a new philosophy, and a new art.

Fortuitously, Batman had better gadgets.

Endnotes

- ¹ V. Hugo, *Człowiek śmiechu*, Warszawa 1955, vol. I, p. 38.
- ² M. Bakhtin, *Twórczość Franciszka Rabelais'ego a kultura ludowa średniowiecza i renesansu*, Kraków 1975, p. 446.
- ³ Ibidem.
- ⁴ Cf. W. Willeford, *The Fool and his Sceptre. A Study in Clowns and Their Audience*, Northwestern University Press 1969.
- ⁵ V. Hugo, op. cit., p. 39.
- ⁶ K. Dorosz, *Faust współczesny czyli de pacto homini politici cum diabolo*, in: *Maski Prometeusza. Eseje konserwatywne*, London 1989, p. 28.
- ⁷ Ibidem, p. 27.
- ⁸ Ibidem, p. 22.
- ⁹ Ibidem, p. 28.
- ¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 29.
- ¹¹ M. Janion, *Maska Maski. Ontologiczne nieszczęście Człowieka Śmiechu*, (in:) *Maski*, Gdańsk 1986, vol. II, p. 406.
- ¹² Ibidem, p. 407.



The world as a work of art

Asked by a French critic about his fascination with technology, Zbigniew Rybczyński responded contrarily that he regards it as an obstacle. More, he believes that it is impossible to achieve a desired goal and admitted that he would like his films to flow in the manner of life.¹

Could it be that the master of the video technique wished to capture with the assistance of computer technology the indeterminate “stream of life” in the manner of the Old Masters of painting or the novel? The thematic axis of Rybczyński’s numerous films is the symbolically portrayed “path of life” – from childhood to death and further on (e.g. the video clip: *Imagine* to music by John Lennon). In *Washington* a little girl plays with a kitten. A moment later she is already an old woman while the kitten has amazingly preserved eternal youth. Several sequences in *The Orchestra* also evoke the symbolic scheme of human life. Rybczyński starts his story from the end – a hearse appears at the beginning of the film and re-emerges at its conclusion.

The stream of images in *The Orchestra* is not ruled by the laws of association suggesting the reality of slumber or dream. This is not oneiric poetic or that of Surrealism. The succession of images is subjected to concealed symbolic action, which has its laws and rhythms, e.g. the sequence of the hearse – putting out candles – “resurrection”; childhood – growing up – serpent and apple – double bed. A courting scene involving maidens and hussars in the chambers of the Louvre is followed by an “apotheosis” of marriage – a couple of naked lovers soars below the vaulting of Chartres cathedral. The second part of the film consists of a parade of characters across a never-ending keyboard with girls and boys growing up, getting old and dying while playing the same tune. Another metaphor of life is the protagonist’s journey high above the earth along narrow planks on which normal, human affairs – food, sex, the struggle for women and money take place (part three).

This manner of depicting the path of life in *The Orchestra* brings to mind mediaeval or Baroque allegories. Rybczyński admires the allegorical art of past centuries. What meanings pertaining to human fate as a whole have been encoded? In what space is this uninterrupted game of life and significance played?

In Rybczyński’s world human space is totally artificial. This feature is additionally emphasized by elements of Nature introduced at the beginning and end of the film: birdsong, a hooting owl. First we see a seashore, which too appears to be not quite part of this particular film. Only when a hearse appears along the beach do we know for certain that it is “ours”. The framework of the film – and that of human life – is Nature. On the other hand, everything that is human

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transpires in artificial space and time with references exclusively to the sphere of culture.

Rybczyński shows that human space is always symbolic. There appear certain key motifs: an apple, fire, bread and wine, a serpent. Sometimes this is sacral space, as in the sequence from *Ave Maria* by Schubert, whose background is Chartres cathedral. In the last sequence – Ravel’s *Bolero* — we deal with sacral space à rebours: this is communist *sacrum*, degraded, false, and hopeless. But each time it is symbolic space. Man cannot force his way beyond it.

The paradox of art consists of the fact that that, which is artificial to the utmost sometimes indicates something that is as human as can be. I recall a certain moment from Fellini’s *And the Ship Sails On*, when the director appears together with a camera on the set of a ship rocked by a hydraulic device. We see the camera, the sets and the technical backstage but nevertheless are moved. Whence came this feeling once the backstage was revealed? This was a moment of particular tension, a betrayal of the artificial reality created on screen. Disillusion is an omnipresent strategy in twentieth-century art; it grants contemporary art the mark of irony or self-mockery. But in this case disillusion is not the disclosure of the artist’s “deception” or the manifestation of his absolute power. On the contrary, the director hands himself over to the spectators and craves complete acceptance not only for the products of his imagination. The credibility of the recounted story no longer calls for the autonomy of the portrayed world. This is the emotion, or rather its trace, that I experienced while watching *The Orchestra*. A specifically human element appears within computer technology.

In *Steps* Rybczyński showed the console at which he works, while in *The Orchestra* we encounter the intriguing master of ceremony who fulfils the function of the “inner author”. From time to time he appears on stage to personally supervise the progress of the spectacle. In the first sequence he is the waiter passing glasses in the “netherworld” and the magician juggling

tody Leonarda da Vinci in the collection: *Estetyka Słowa*, Warszawa 1971). He recalls that Leonardo began executing a painting with the deepest black and slowly progressed to light hues. In an interview for “Kino” Rybczyński admitted that he sees his future films as “half an hour of blackness” from which shapes and colours emerge.⁴

I also found out from Andrzej Barański that Rybczyński loves technology, not only the great electronic variety but also its small counterpart – assorted tools, screws, nuts and bolts. Just as other people search in antique shops so Rybczyński has his favourite tool store in New York. He admires the technical efficacy of America, e.g. nineteenth-century wooden “skyscrapers” and fire-escape stairs mounted to the outside, so characteristic for the New York landscape. Rybczyński does not glorify technology but renders it an ally of his cinematic epistemology:

*Our instruments may be primitive but with their help it is possible to discover something in reality that is not connected with its actual reception. (...) Thanks to new tools we perfect the possibilities of perception. (...) We can come closer to reality if we obtain the ease of operating with instruments. Then we shall be able to create a world somewhat similar to our thoughts.*⁵

II. Game of space and time

Miłosz Benedyktowicz defined Rybczyński’s *oeuvre* as “manipulation with time and space”. The objective of some of his films is to test time (*The Orchestra, Imagine*) and in others – to experiment with space (*Manhattan, Washington*). The films are dominated by an eternal present. There is no past or anticipation. There is only a narrow “now” repeated upon numerous occasions. Time is either depicted as a continuum or as “the edge of a knife” between two moments—both perspectives occur interchangeably.

Repeatability and rhythm are an – illusory – victory over time. Rybczyński thus tries to outwit time. Watching “floating” or “turning” space in such films as *Manhattan* and *Washington* we always hope that the same image will be repeated: the same face will appear on the other side of the screen, the director’s adorable dachshund will play over and over again. When the outlined figure of Miłosz Benedyktowicz (deceased) appears in *Washington* the simple operation of repetition gains unexpected acuteness. We wait impatiently for the camera’s close-up of Benedyktowicz, but quite a different game is already played on the screen. Rhythm binds image and sound, time and space into an entity. Rybczyński exploits the “artificial” rhythms of classical music and the “natural” rhythms of breathing or heartbeat, brilliantly transposed in music by Michał Urbaniak.

Rybczyński also exploits all forms of motion: the dance, circular motion, up-and-down motion, or motion deforming space (*The Fourth Dimension*). In each of his films he sets into motion the same objects taken

rather from the order of culture than Nature, and prefers chairs to flowers, beds to trees, a dachshund to a wild beast and *The Mona Lisa* to clouds. He sets into motion the element of the self and the world, time and space, imagination and cultural memory, objects from the refuse heap of mass culture and respectable props from the archive of myths and archetypes.

The director would probably agree with Mikhail Bakhtin who claimed: *When studying man, we search for and find signs everywhere (...)*.⁶ The only path towards cognition and self-cognition is thus an interpretation of signs. In Rybczyński’s films all objects are signs – they do not attract attention by their *être-en-soi* but refer to a domain beyond themselves. They include such symbols of past epochs and our contemporaneity as the telephone and the toilet bowl. Even Nature appears to be an artefact existing solely thanks to the mercy of the artist. A characteristic feature of Rybczyński is his absolute freedom in using the symbol – instead of an apple he immediately introduces a whole tray full of apples and a serpent is the size of a boa constrictor.

Studying his films one could resort to a semiotic analysis and seek predominantly significant relations and opposites. Just like the structuralists Rybczyński tries to capture the way “in which our world is made”, the laws of our time, space and intellect (which could be one and the same). The quest for “universal laws that govern mythical thought” is according to Lévi-Strauss the fundamental duty of twentieth-century art.⁷

Considering the models of the world in Rybczyński’s films it is impossible to neglect the philosophy of translation present in his art. The question of translating is the central issue of contemporary semiotics based on the idea of the translation, i.e. the transference of meaning from one system of signs to another. At this stage it is worth recalling the slightly older, Cabbalistic and hermetic conceptions of translation. The essence of Cabbala practices was incessant translation from the language of Nature, the cosmos or the elements into that of the human spirit and body. The Cabbalists changed the words of the Torah into numbers and new words endowed with magical power. Translation from one language into another or one art into another called for a third element of a “language-intermediary”, which is the medium of translation. This function can be fulfilled by time or space, sound or light. The Cabbala focuses on a translation of the Torah and the world. The word changes into visible reality, as in the prose by Schulz, when spring bursts forth from the Book... In Rybczyński’s work music blossoms into a garden or a cathedral. In the light of Cabbalistic philosophy the “third element” always involved in the process of translation is God. In this manner, the *sacrum* reveals itself along the crossing of the codes of culture.⁸

Apparently, the Cabbalistic theory of translation makes it possible to perceive Rybczyński’s films differently – not from the “technical” side but from the

Cabbalistic viewpoint. Just as in the works of the Cabbalists the film witnesses an endless process of translation. Rybczyński – in the spirit of the Cabbalists – seeks the third element, the liaison between music and film. The discovered liaison is the element of time. Music is as if tamed time. Dance is the subjugation of space. We cannot tell what is a translation of what. This is not a visualisation of music but identical symbolic action pursued in several sign systems simultaneously.

The Cabbalists believed that translation leads the scholar to the contemplation of the *sacrum* concealed both in the holy signs of the Books and in the empty space between the signs. In the case of Rybczyński, the contemplation of mobile forms also indicates the existence of emptiness and motionlessness. Interestingly, the ceaseless process of translation does not produce an impression of chaos and clamour. Rybczyński's moving images refer us somewhere beyond the screen, towards an invisible backdrop, the place of the birth and disappearance of forms.

III. The game is a serious matter

*I would like to register the flow of time in genuine creation – Rybczyński said in a conversation with Tadeusz Sobolewski. – To have such an unrestricted workshop so as to be capable of capturing the duality of our thoughts: yes and no, and yes, no and no. ... And construction? Construction always exists in the world but we are unable to comprehend it. Nature, the universe are governed by laws of their own. Everything contains concealed structures unknown to us. Once we comprehend them we shall be capable of building something that at present seems to be chaos. Right now we are still confused. Imitation is not a way out. Expression – the process of expressing oneself – is meaningless. The only thing worth pursuing is the discovery of principles in science, art, everything.*⁹

Rybczyński is, therefore, concerned not with expression or mimesis but with a special sort of creation. His films juxtapose the chaos of life and increasingly new models of the world. The author's imagination is to be supported by a disciplined experiment that would make it feasible to disclose the poetic of our world, a product of the applied arts. The objective consists of deciphering universal, possibly mathematical, rules of the game.

Art pursued by Rybczyński thus harbours maximalist ambitions. It is those bold ambitions that are served by computer technology. In *The Orchestra* in particular we can encapsulate the director's efforts to capture the culmination. Quite conceivably, this is a hazardous attempt. Has Rybczyński managed to depict certain rhythms and categories pertaining to the whole human world? The viewer is under the impression that outside the stream of life on the screen the surface of symbolic and allegorical imagery conceals some sort of a code, a model of human existence.

In our culture the "essence of things" is usually sought in intellectual speculations or along the con-

templative path of self-cognition. Rybczyński proposes a third course – a game played with the symbols of culture. The value of the game is familiar to children and artists. In his novel *Shosha*, I. B. Singer formulated the hypothesis that the game, which is the principle of our reality, is also the essence of the "thing-in-itself":

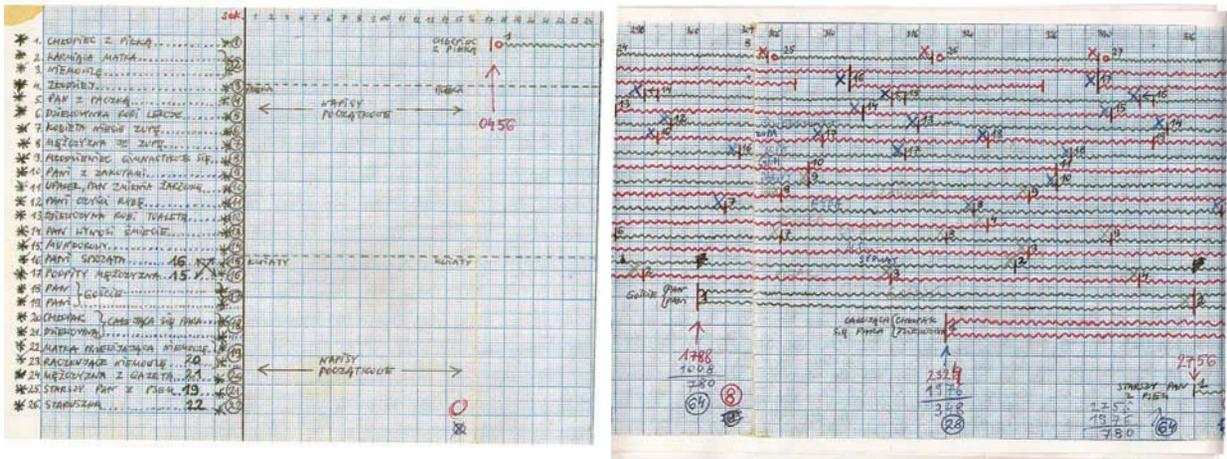
Since we are sure of nothing and there is even no evidence that the sun will rise tomorrow, play is the very essence of human endeavour, perhaps even the thing-in-itself. God is a player, the cosmos a playground. For years Singer tried to discover the foundation of ethics, and ultimately resigned. Suddenly it became clear that it is possible to base human ethics on man's right to play his game according to a choice that no one may compel him to make.¹⁰

Play is not frivolous — declared Hans Georg Gadamer¹¹ Contemporary philosophy and anthropology attach high rank to the conceit of play. Frequently, it acts as a key to a certain vision of culture (e.g. in works by J. Huizinga and R. Caillois). In Hindu philosophy it is one of the fundamental concepts with a metaphysical reference. The entire world is a game of Omni-consciousness— claimed the contemporary Hindu sage Swami Muktananda.¹²

Thanks to the played game the sole divine principle assumes the form of the world and becomes everything. For "liberated" man unity is always seen from behind multiplicity, and awareness of the world is primeval, independent *vis a vis* the predilection for its diversity. The Hindu conception of play is associated with the idea of the dance. The visual form of divine play, known as *leela*, is the dance performed by Shiva. Muktananda declared that the Lord of Supreme Consciousness compels all 8 400 000 species to dance on the stage of the outer world. Each performs its strange dance, as in a film. More, each – from Brahma to an insect – has been granted a suitable body. The human being, however, has succumbed to servitude and the lifelessness of his ego, he has forgotten his Self and suffers.¹³

One of the symbols of the Shiva dance is the multi-hued, opalescent peacock. The whirling circles of his feathers set time and space into motion. Shiva is the god of death and resurrection, the destruction and eternal transformation of forms. He could have been the patron of film. According to an ancient Hindu text all creatures of this world are assorted roles played by a single actor, God.¹⁴

Interestingly, seeking a metaphorical description of this dance, the very essence of human existence, the Hindu sage said: as in a film. It is precisely film that he envisaged as an analogy to the world of perennial change. At this stage we could add: just like in Rybczyński's film. Video technology created heretofore unknown possibilities of showing the endless resources of transformations.



Zbigniew Rybczyński, *Tango*, fragments of screenplay

The film technique of permeation conceals the suggestion that the individual is not enclosed within his limits but constitutes an exchangeable element. This fluidity of boundaries, however, does not carry negative connotations (anonymity, mass-scale qualities, etc.); on the contrary, it has a positive meaning. There is no gap between man and man and they fluently cross over. The game is conducted incessantly, and taking and giving, dressing and undressing go on endlessly. Life and death occur interchangeably – one dies and is resurrected while dancing. Death is only a masquerade and in the multitude of symbols it has lost its “sting”.

The significance of Rybczyński’s imagery cannot be contained within a single definition. It is difficult to ascertain whether the first sequence is an allegory of *vanitas* or of paradise, since each image in *The Orchestra* contains antinomy – or the idea of a paradoxical conciliation of opposites – and evokes assorted parts of the world of meanings, the world of life: in this interpretation passage and eternity, motion and motionless, life and infinity appear to be extremes of the same principle. The essence of such play is the struggle between the symbolic (and thus specifically human and creative) and the accidental, mechanical. The Japanese *High Definition* technique of the image used by Rybczyński is not only a tool but also an ideal model of a perception of the world. On a daily basis we live in a reality chaotically fragmented and “glued together” with the assistance of stereotypes of thinking and seeing. How can we link the “highest definition” of perception with the profound experience of unity?

Where is the fixed point? - asks the director celebrating his “turns of events”: *Here [motion of the camera – A. S.] lies the whole theory of relativity. Are we moving or is it the world that is moving around us? Where is the fixed point? But at that stage we are entering the domain of metaphysics, and we were not supposed to talk about metaphysics.*¹⁵

The search conducted by Rybczyński brings to mind T. S. Elliot’s poem: *At the Still Point of the Turning World*, inspired by a paradoxical vision of Shiva’s dance in which motion and absolute stillness are one:

*At the still point of the turning world.
Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards;
at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. [...].*

Endnotes

- 1 J. Kermabon, *Inny wymiar*, interview with Zbigniew Rybczyński, transl. W. Wertenstein, “Kino” 1991, no. 2.
- 2 F. Nietzsche, *Wola mocy*, (in:) *Dzieła*, Warszawa 1907, p. 419.
- 3 F. Nietzsche, *Narodziny tragedii*, (in:) *Dzieła*, p. 22.
- 4 T. Sobolewski, *Fantazja na żywo*, *Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Rybczyńskim*, “Kino” 1991, no. 2.
- 5 Ibidem.
- 6 M. Bakhtin, *Problem tekstu. Próba analizy filozoficznej*, transl. A. Prus-Bogusławski, “Twórczość” 1977, no. 5, p. 54.
- 7 Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Antropologia strukturalna*, Warszawa 1970.
- 8 I discussed this topic more extensively in: *Czytanie kabaly*, in: *Problemy wiedzy o kulturze. Prace dedykowane Stefanowi Żółkiewskiemu*, ed. A. Brodzka, M. Hopfinger, J. Lalewicz, Wrocław 1986.
- 9 T. Sobolewski, op. cit.
- 10 I. B. Singer, *Szosza*, transl. S. Sal, Warszawa 1991, p. 166.
- 11 H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Cited after: J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Hermenutyka Gadamerowska w etnograficznym badaniu obcości*, “Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty” 1992, no. 1, p. 15 (fts).
- 12 Swami Muktananda, *The Mysteries of the Siddhas*, Ganeshpuri (India), 1975, p. 373.
- 13 Ibid., p. 48.
- 14 Pratyabhi jandradayam. *The Secret of Self-Recognition*, prep. J. Singh, Delhi 1980, vol. III, p. 9.
- 15 T. Sobolewski, op. cit.

ZBIGNIEW
BENEDYKTOWICZ

Tango – a Dance of Universal Alienation

These comments and reflections (preceded by a screening of two short films by Zbigniew Rybczyński: *Wdech-wydech /Inhale-Exhale/* realised jointly with Bogdan Dziworski¹ and *Tango*, the Oscar-winner from 1983²) originated upon the margin of a book on Rybczyński's *oeuvre* prepared by the Film Workshop in the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences³. I would like to present them as a contribution to the theme: "Ethnology and contemporaneity". Today, the very fact that contemporary ethnology deals with film as a cultural text is no longer exceptional, rare, strange or isolated as testified by the development of a separate domain, namely, the anthropology of film perceived either as a sub-discipline of ethnology or as a specific interpretation approach intent on analysis. Emphasis is placed on joint experiences shared by photography, film, ethnography, and anthropology⁴. A new type of "writing" or rather creating anthropology is progressing with the assistance of photography, the film camera, and video; this so-called visual anthropology contains anthropological reflection on contemporary and past phenomena of visual culture. My remarks, therefore, can be a contribution or justification of the legitimacy, need, and purposefulness of the application of such an anthropological perception of film, its examination from an anthropological perspective, and the discovery of the anthropological coefficient contained therein. Briefly and simply, such a contribution could be entitled: *On the Need and Sensibility of Writing an Anthropological Commentary on a Film that No One Will Write Apart from an Anthropologist*.

A direct reason for my comments is the review by Charles Solomon published in "The Los Angeles Times" soon after the titular film received an Oscar, and titled (in a way captivating not only the anthropologist): *Tango – A Polish Dance of Alienation*. Solomon wrote: *Tango is an almost hypnotically complex work that requires several viewings to grasp completely*.

To the accompaniment of an old and rusty tango the viewers see an empty anonymous room. A ball falls inside

followed by a boy climbing through the window. The film seems to be based on live action, but its structure remains curious – the motions performed by the boy are repeated with astonishing precision. When he appears in the room once again, there enters woman holding a baby, to depart a moment later. The action develops to the moment when there are 26 actors and actresses present and the room becomes more crowded than the ship cabin in the Marx Brothers movie: *A Night at the Opera*. The crowd slowly disperses and the room empties. Importantly, these people do not cooperate, each continues his activity isolated, totally indifferent, and without reacting to the surrounding chaos – a comment on cramped flats in Polish towns and the painful alienation produced by this state of things, Solomon concluded.⁵

In contrast to the highly promising title this unambiguous and authoritative, seriously sounding housing-cultural interpretation features startling simplicity and is the reason why it becomes so difficult to refrain from smiling. But an equal feeling of dissatisfaction is produced by other explanations proposed in studies consistently developing the motif of the Polish housing problem. Characteristically, they all concentrate on workshop and strictly technical issues, as a rule stressing the banal nature and insignificance of the story. More, they caution against seeking in the film deeper philosophical contents. This primacy of technical questions is accompanied predominantly by reflections stressing that Rybczyński made the transition from the cinema to a new formula while abandoning the film for the sake of another. Such deliberations focus on the fact that he had discovered a novel form of depiction made possible by the video technique. Here are some samples.

In the article *Comme un Polonais* Jean Paul Fargier wrote: *Zbigniew Rybczynski fait de la Vidéo depuis toujours. Même quand il tournait en Pologne des films expérimentaux, il faisait de la Vidéo. Tango, (...) c'est indiscutablement de la Vidéo, même si son support est du film et que tous ses trucages sont de classiques caches/contre-caches cinématographiques*.

The time and spatial strategy, Fargier went on to say, which organises this ingenious work is part of a video approach. Its intention was to create the possibility of simultaneously watching about thirty actions taking place at the same time in a very small room (with a window, three doors, a wardrobe, a table, and a bed). Initially, the room is empty, but then a ball drops in through the window, followed by a boy climbing into the interior to throw the ball out and leave. The ball, however immediately, returns and so does the child. Note: this is a loop, followed by another, with a man entering and taking (stealing?) a suitcase lying on the wardrobe. Another twenty or even thirty actions will occur in the cramped space. A man sitting at the table eats soup brought by a woman and

departs once he finishes. The moment he leaves the table, another man enters the room, stands on the table to change a light bulb and, departing, leaves space for a woman, already appearing with a plate of soup ... Each particle of space is put to maximum use. The bed is used for changing a baby's diaper, for waiting for death, for making love. The overall effect is nine and half of *Nowa książka* (New Book, Rybczyński's previous experimental film – Z.B.) multiplied by three or four⁶.

Further on the French critic posed a symptomatic question, asking whether we are dealing with a housing crisis or a crisis of the cinema? When he first watched *Tango* he thought about the housing crisis in Poland and other socialist countries. Watching it for a second time he noticed a crisis of film (in a country of widely disseminated TV). *Tango* is cinema itself (with its doors and windows, entries and exits, banal and well-used scenarios), revealed at a time of the direct. Everything is visible in the foreground: tragedy and burlesque are expressed with finesse but gain density. There is no reason to mourn. Film represented a certain dramatic and comic force and, at times, enormous emotions. Video, on the other hand, opens up to a new world of emotion, laughter, and drama.⁷

Time to turn to analyses conducted from the inside and let the Polish authors speak. Marcin Giżycki: *A ball falls through a window into an empty ensuite room. A boy enters in the same way. He takes the ball and jumps out of the window. The ball immediately falls inside. The cycle is repeated, like a stuck gramophone record. Other figures enter from different directions. They behave as if they were alone in the room. All perform strictly defined activities and depart, to immediately reappear and repeat exactly the same motions. Despite the fact that the number of people continues to grow their paths miraculously cross in such a way that they never collide. This is Rybczyński's sui generis masterpiece, capable of coordinating all those activities in time with the precision of a fraction of a second, so that they overlap in the manner of a clockwork mechanism. An ordinary enactment by actors would be simply impossible, and even if they were to succeed to a certain extent they would still not attain that mechanical character of the plot, which, after all, comprises the very essence of the film. During the culmination, the room contains more than thirty persons, a number that we simply have to accept since we got lost counting already much earlier. Subsequently, the interior starts to gradually empty in the same way as it became full of people – now, after his/her successive departure a given character no longer returns and does not renew the cycle. The contents of the film, therefore, are motion and variable spatial relations between the protagonists – motion increases up to a certain moment and then is followed by an utmost complication of all the gathered figures and a decline of motion, until all*

action ceases. The dramaturgy of Tango is constructed by means of a densification, in the literal meaning of the word, of the situation. Each entry of a new resident intensifies the tension: "How will he manage to cross the room"? People keep arriving. Every surprising ending would topple the logic of the premise, although the author took the liberty of a slight deviation by allowing himself in the finale to slightly change the activity of the departing persons, which we could disapprove if it were to point the message of the film to a completely new direction. Since nothing of the sort takes place, the accepted solution is treated as a natural musical cadenza justified also in the title.

*Familiarity with Rybczyński almost guarantees that Tango interested him predominantly as a technical problem. He simply had an idea and knew how to realise it. Hence the need to be rather careful while seeking some sort of more profound philosophical intentions (and such attempts have been made). Nonetheless, while differentiating the characters as regards their makeup and costume (on the margin, the man in a red coat from *Nowa książka* resurfaces) and designing the sets the author created a specifically Polish panopticon. Everything takes place in a cramped ensuite room, that symbol of Polish housing difficulties but also of the democratisation of Polish society (after all, it is in such a room that the Polish post-war intelligentsia queued up to the bathroom together with members of the working class, as documented by Leonard Buczkowski in his celebrated comedy *Skarb / Treasure*). A gallery of average Poles appearing in the apartment represents a full range of fulfilled functions – from intercourse to death. Copulation, eating, dressing, cleaning, and even (presumably, since they take place beyond the frame, behind the bathroom door) washing and defecation. These may be secondary contents but they still produce numerous and various associations⁸.*

Finally, the opinion of Daniel Szczechura: *The realisation of *Nowa książka*, *Tango* and other films is based on a mammoth music score containing the movements of particular characters. This is the reason for the absence of photos in Rybczyński's films. It was impossible to obtain a photo from *Nowa książka*, since the final effect was but a product of the author's imagination and laboratory processing. (...) Assorted figures appear in an empty room as if on stage and perform simple daily activities. In time, their number grows, new people arrive, and each does the same. A boy leans through a window and picks up a ball that had fallen into the room, a woman changes a baby's nappies, a girl does her homework, a granny dies, etc. The culmination scene resembles a ballet or a pantomime of sorts, in which 26 characters take part. The action then slows down and once again we are left with an empty room. Everything takes place to the accompaniment of a tango. This film, simple and applying limited means, makes a great impression. After the screening there invariably emerges the question: how was this done? True, something like this has never been seen before⁹.*

Daniel Szczechura, himself an accomplished author and craftsman in this particular cinematic domain, reveals the secrets of filmmaking. His extremely meticulous and professional technical description reconstructs the production of *Tango* step by step. Why then do the analyses, as I have mentioned, seem to be insufficient? The reason lies in the fact that even when concentrated on the film and attempt to provide a detailed and thorough description they remain as if imprisoned within it and are doomed to repetition. In a manner of speaking, they evade attempts at answering the question: "What does *Tango* mean?" and even the much less penetrating: "Can *Tango* actually mean something?". It is here that I perceive the place and role of an anthropologist who could propose a commentary. Initially, it might appear that such an approach of an expert on the cinema to the dilemma in question: a technical (material) description or a quest for meaning, appears to be closer to the intentions of the author, who himself voices his opinion (I cite only a fragment of his statement, to which I shall return at the end of the text): *The most important is technology. One can speak about the beauty of the pyramid, but the way in which it was built is more essential. The same holds true for the Eiffel Tower. The construction of this enormous steel structure gave rise to protests. It was claimed that it was ugly. Now it has become the sentimental symbol of Paris. First there comes construction and technology, and only later do they become surrounded with meanings and produce an ambiance*¹⁰.

There exists, however, another extreme and different point of view declaring that we should not trust artists all the way. Or else, we may trust them but never believe what they say nor succumb to them.

In an interview published in "Konteksty" Janusz Bogucki drew attention to this issue by declaring: *An artist concentrates on that, which emerges in his mind and gradually changes into an object. Later, he works on this object and becomes totally immersed in its inner world. But then the object starts to pursue a life of its own, just as genuine as its original life in the artist's head and studio. Acting in this way the author does not really know what he is doing and is only partly aware of his conduct. A true artist is unaware of what he is doing and remains an instrument, a source of energy that becomes transferred into some sort of matter somewhat according to the principle of intentions but, predominantly, premonitions – true, the intellect wields control, professional skills are available, but how is all this possible considering that it is not a question of planning and execution? If the later is the case then the aesthetic object remains empty inside, but if we are dealing with a creative act then in a certain sense it remains independent of the author*¹¹.

Opting for such a stand and convinced that *Tango* is not an empty aesthetic object (as evidenced by the views of the afore-mentioned authors: "a hypnotic,

complex work", "a brilliant work", "a masterpiece", "the film makes an enormous impression") let us sum up the opinions of experts on the cinema. The number of extra-film references is scarce. Their interpretation takes place mainly within the range of the discussed work (the way it was made) and in reference to a single context (that of the film), consigning us either to local history of the film (Gizycki – *Skarb*) or its world counterpart – depending on the way in which we perceive it (Solomon – the Marx Brothers in *A Night at the Opera*; Szczechura, following the example of many others, cites Méliès as his point of reference). Meanwhile, the questions: "can *Tango* mean something?" and "does *Tango* mean something?" still remain important and continue to disturb us. They recur persistently and call for an answer. Take the question addressed to the author by a journalist conducting an interview for Andy Warhol's "Interview Magazine" wondering whether after he had won an Oscar the director can explain the meaning of *Tango*. Already forewarned that artists are not to be trusted we can calmly react to the negative response.

What can we do? What is going to happen to our cultural commentary in the wake of the author's *dictum*? We simply have to start at the beginning... Now is the time to go back to Solomon. Against such a backdrop, his rather ridiculous and flat statement, which we immediately rejected and read without the quotation marks: *Tango – a Polish dance of alienation*, still remain captivating and appears to lead us onto a correct course. Something does seem to be right. The tango in Kantor's theatre of death, the tango in Rybczyński's film, the tango in Mrozek's theatre of the absurd (this similarity of the title with Mrozek's drama was even keenly noted by Daniel Luliński, the official correspondent of the dailies "Trybuna Ludu" and "Życie Warszawy" as well as the Polish Press Agency, who concentrated only describing the scandal caused by the Oscar winner. Behaving assertively, Rybczyński tried to shout something about "Solidarity" into the microphone, thus disturbing the solemnity of the event. Then, after he went outside and was prohibited from re-entering by security guards, he started a fight)¹².

Following the example of the interpretation proposed by Solomon: *Tango – A Polish Dance of Alienation* we come to a problem central for anthropology and anthropological-cultural questions, namely, what are the local and universal qualities of culture and the absorption of the universal by the local and *vice versa*? Here, we are dealing with cultural translation. Are we capable of recreating this path? Admittedly, the rather difficult and perilous task resembles the situation from the motto that Jan Kott once gave to his analysis of Mrozek's *Tango*: *No one will leave until we find an idea. Edek, don't let anyone out*¹³. In the most general outline this path could be described as follows:

the local (an exotic Argentinian dance) becomes the universal by turning into the European and the global, and permeates local culture, where it is subjected to artistic, theatrical, literary and film processing in order to come back to universal world culture in a new local costume. This is the manner in which the local and the exotic are restored to the universal. By changing into a Polish speciality the tango as a Polish dance of alienation becomes universal. How does this take place, and how is it possible?

Let us start with the local stratum while attempting, at the same time, not to lose any of the traces contained in descriptions made by heretofore film studies. Not by accident did we begin these comments with a comparison of two very different dance films, i.e. *Tango* and *Wdech-wydech* (Dziworski and Rybczyński); *nota bene*, the French critic was wrong when he wrote that *Tango* was the last film made in Poland - actually, it was the documentary realised together with Dziworski (1981). This is a register and an image of a no longer extant world that appears to have vanished, and here and there is becoming the object of social nostalgia. A world of free-of-charge vacations and sanatoria.

Wdech-wydech is a documentary record of a People's Poland-era holiday (in contrast to the strongly accentuated simple daily life in *Tango*) or actually a training conference carnival attended by cultural-educational instructors of the Polish-Soviet Friendship Society realising a specific programme of "indoor recreation". A portrait of entertainment and competitions (including a contest testing knowledge about the USSR).

Two very different films! *Wdech-wydech* consists of natural interiors and natural music (a ballroom orchestra and music from a croaking loudspeaker), "golden oldies", a dance competition (to the strains of the song: *Moscow Evenings - Podmoskovniye vechera*) or an exotic costume contest, an artistic performance, open-air recreation, pirouettes on ice-skates, an ice-rink surrounded by a mountain landscape; these are living people filmed with precision, attention, and acuteness but also tenderness. Something that does not possess a film reference but can be situated only "between" and "above", something between and above *homo ludens*, *homo sovieticus* and *homo PeReLus* (PRL: People's Poland), and something that could be rather ineptly described as "between" films and socialist documentaries about hairdressing competitions, *Rejs* (The Cruise) by Marek Piwowski and the Czech film school with *Loves of a Blonde* and *The Fireman's Ball*.

Not by accident did we start with two dance-music films since they allow us to recall one more essential component in the *oeuvre* of the author of *Tango*, to draw attention to the ever-present stratum of visual anthropology in Rybczyński's films, and to mention a brief ethnographic-anthropological treatise: *Święto* (Holiday, 1975). Its recorded images come straight out

of a study by Roch Sulima (then recently published) about the *syrenka* automobile¹⁴. *Święto* features the "queen of the roadside", the "stationary automobile", a determinant of social prestige, a hybrid located between the "civilisation of timber" and the "civilisation of technology", and subjected to ceremonious washing. The ritual of a festive family gathering, together with gestures, greetings and farewells, embraces, first-name ceremonies and toasts, a visit to a cemetery, remembrance of the deceased by "lighting lamps for All Souls", and a baby crying in the background - brought to the cemetery, it grows aggravated in the baby carriage. Finally, there is the holiday ritual of the whole family watching TV. Hurried lovemaking (in the bushes of an allotment) - Eros and Thanatos (as in other films by Rybczyński) are close by. This is the way a foreign critic sees it: a petite woman in a suburban yard chops off the head of a chicken - a symbolic ritual of blood and the sacrifice of life inaugurating a calm, orderly, traditional family ceremony. A man drives out of a garage in a white car leaving behind a trail of green exhaust fumes. There now begins the ceremony of washing the car with yellowish water. A family of eight, together with a baby in a carriage, arrives at the home of an elderly married couple and preforms a *sui generis* ritual welcome dance. Next, they eat dinner - the slaughtered chicken together with delectable beverages. Afterwards, bored and unwilling to converse, they all watch television and their silence contrasts with a wild chase on the TV screen. Finally, a farewell ritual.

These cosy scenes from family liturgy are interrupted with takes showing a couple secretly fleeing the dinner and making love behind the house; the awkward ballet performed by their arms and legs renders them similar to insects devouring each other.

The man washing the car ends his task, immediately drives the beloved status symbol back into the garage, and closes the door. The elderly couple, now alone, remains in the room, with granddad soaking his feet and granny in bed, watching the same TV programme¹⁵. Rybczyński's camera, both in *Święto* and in such experiments as an image divided into nine fragments (*Nowa książka*) or a frenzied chase in: *Oj, nie mogę się zatrzymać* (Oh, I Can't Stop!), records and "renders indelible" customs, gestures, banal life, ugly townscapes and suburbs, registering the - what would be the best way of putting it? - ethnography of a small town, brief histories, old crumbling architecture and old-new housing-block socialist architecture, "reality neither urban nor rural" described by Piotr Szczepanik in the song: *Tango for half a złoty*. Outstanding artists are supposed to be the creators of a single work, revived in numerous forms; this is the opinion about Fellini and Bergman.

Tango (and its *sui generis* visual anthropology, the experience of Polish films) is a structure of impor-

tance for Rybczyński's *oeuvre*, continued in his other works; sometimes, we may even find its small elements (such as the gestures and twirling motion performed in *Wdech-Wydech* by a man dancing to the accompaniment of *Podmoskovniye vechera*, the energetic spins of magnificent American girls speeding across Manhattan on roller skates in the music video for *The Original Wrapper* by Lou Reed)

A drawing-note at the very beginning of a monograph about Rybczyński – probably a sketch to an experimental HDTV film for *Imagine* (three ensuite rooms, with the same figure of a man standing behind closed doors) - features at the bottom:

- is he all alone? – like the other figures
- repetition and addition - like in *Tango*?
- continuum of a certain story – one - several?
- what sort of a construction of the whole?

The protagonists of Rybczyński's film are not only "motion and spatial relations between the protagonists", studies in space and time, bipacking, a reprojector, masks, and high definition but also cultural relations and motion.

In an excellent study about the symbols and art that nurture this sort of creativity Małgorzata Baranowska, the author of "symbolic realism" - a conceit crucial for the creativity and art pursued by Rybczyński and a term with which she attempted to encompass and interpret his last films - indicated also a particular cultural stratum. Here, we once again come across the afore-mentioned incessant game, motion, and relations between the local and the universal: *Manhattan is a vision of a poetic entity composed of a huge number of separate cultures with their colours, costumes, melodies, dances, artists, New Yorkers suffering from insomnia, somewhat comical policemen and felons outwitting them, the homeless as well as inept politicians performing ritual gestures and oblivious of everything else. A characteristic feature of Rybczyński's films is their sense of humour. Both he and Michał Urbaniak did everything possible so that successive sequences would startle with changes but also at times with amusing sound and image. Probably the boldest scenes in Manhattan involve a fiery tango danced by Argentinians; the scenes are divided according to the popular rhythms of particular nationalities comprising the enormous ethnic mixture of New York. The middle parts of the bodies of the dancing couple have been replaced by large bellows, similar to an accordion squeezebox, stretching and folding to the rhythm of the music and rendering the dancers either giants or dwarfs. The overall effect is that of an image-sound play on words. Rap music danced in the air is equally funny – rhythm inseparably connected with stamping feet is suddenly suspended above a street* ¹⁶.

The anthropological dimension is to be discovered in both films about *genius loci* – as they were described by Małgorzata Baranowska who amassed in an abbreviated form the themes contained therein: *Films about*

genius loci amazingly link Rybczyński's uninterrupted studies on time and space with a vision of highly different towns. Here, the landscape retains its static character and people performing symbolic activities in an incredible dance of relativity define the character of the place. In great abridgement and simplification: Manhattan represents a great musician, a homeless artist, a child, a policeman, a kaleidoscope of worlds and various peoples, life, youth, love, home, and contemporaneity. Washington D. C. embodies a civil servant, a discoverer, a hunter, an assailant, a disappearance of old cultures, a soldier, a carnival, possession, money, love and betrayal, the passage of time, history ¹⁷. Now, time to return to Poland. We are well aware of the differences between the tango in the case of Mrozek (1964), Kantor, and Rybczyński, and this is not the place to delve into the subject. The tango (*La Cumparsita*) in Mrozek's play is a dance of submission to which we are invited by a power-wielding brute (*an offer you can't refuse*); is it some sort of a vision of our impotence or an echo and transposition of the dance of the Straw Man from the arch-drama *Wesele* (The Wedding)?¹⁸. Jan Kott derived the protagonists – the *Mrozek Family* ¹⁹ - from *Kurka wodna* (The Water Hen) by Witkacy. Jan Błoński wrote: *In Tango suicide is committed by the idea of rebellion; it turns into its own opposite because freedom announced by avantgarde art is perishing in the grotto of Edek the caveman, to which it guided us* ²⁰.

Different features belong to the room of reminiscences, the room of the dead mechanically repeating elementary motions. In Kantor's theatre the tango appears rather late: first in a dive in: *Nigdy już tu nie powrócę* (I Shall Never Return, 1988) as a sign of time and place: *The first part, an All Souls Day in a mysterious dive, is conducted by the Argentinian tango Tempos viejos (a replica of sorts of Waltz François from Umarła klasa /The Dead Class/)* ²¹, and then in *Cicha Noc* (Silent Night): *Figures slowly begin to emerge from unravelled shrouds. They successively describe their comical and tragic personal catastrophes. A whole gallery ensues. All are already strongly enrooted in the iconography of the Cricot 2 Theatre – a young Hassidic Jew in an overcoat and a skullcap; a dancing priest holding a wooden cross; a girl sleepwalking; a bigot wearing a rosary around his neck; a demonic streetwalker; a sensually dancing woman in mourning; a man merged with a broom, and another with a black umbrella; a World War I soldier and the "uninvited" in dark spectacles and a roll of paper hanging around his neck. The stage resounds with a tango. Every one dances in eccentrically joined couples.* ²².

The anonymous room in Rybczyński's *Tango* is far from the intelligentsia-intellectual "Warsaw salon" just as its protagonists are far from Kantor's phantoms; from the structural point of view they are closer to anonymous plain people from *Pieszko* (On Foot) by Mrozek; despite the video film animation technique these are

living people (filmed in the *live action* technique). One of the interpretations suggests that perhaps Rybczyński shot the room's memory of its (living? – Z. B.) residents²³. Since reference had been made to the "en-suite room" then both for Kantor and Rybczyński the background would certainly include the room-flat from *Kartoteka* (The Card Index) by Różewicz (although in Rybczyński's case without the threnody of Romantic protagonists or the wartime past).

Tango is situated as closely as possible to the universal/local roots of the tango due to its anonymous and commonplace protagonists (the screenplay mentions that they are people busy doing something: 1. Boy with a ball, 2. Nursing mother, 3. Infant, 4. Thief, 5. Man with a parcel, 6. Girl doing her homework, 7. Woman carrying soup, 8. Man eating soup, 9. Young man doing exercises, 10. Woman with shopping, 11. Man changing a light bulb, 12. Woman cleaning a fish, 13. Girl dressing herself, 14. Man taking out the litter, 15. Man in a uniform, 16. Woman cleaning, 17. Slightly intoxicated man, 8, 19. Man and woman – guests, 20, 21. Kissing couple, 22. Mother changing a baby's nappies, 23. Crawling infant, 24. Man with a newspaper, 25. Older man with a dog, 26. Old woman)²⁴.

Time to finally seek the opinion of an expert, an anthropologist of culture, and evoke cultural references. This task is made easy by the fact that such a function can be fulfilled by a writer. I have in mind not just any man of letters but Ernesto Sábato, author of an essay about the tango. In doing so I used two sources²⁵ (and thus hope that certain repetitions and reoccurrences in the text will be forgiven). I also preceded "information" about the tango with an excerpt of Sábato's ethnographic reflections about the subculture of the suburbs, important also for our topic: ethnology and contemporaneity. Here we shall find the periphery and the centre, the eternal question about cultural peripheries, *Can anything good come out of Nazareth?* (here: from the culture and art of Poland and Argentina, aside from the tango), a question in which one might find echoes of Gombrowicz's enquiry about the merit of the cultural peripheries, immaturity, local qualities, and "imperfection", which at times can prove to be a higher value:

Subculture of the suburbs²⁶

The rightist nationalists densely populating sterile and pure Argentine want us to write constantly about (non-existent) gauchos. Leftist nationalists, on the other hand, maintain that metaphysical problems are suitable for the old European civilisation.... According to this curious doctrine, only the residents of Paris or Prague can suffer "metaphysical pain", and if one is aware that the cause of this pain is man's finity then it should be recognised that in the opinion of those madmen people die only in Europe but here they live on immortal. This is not the case, because if

*metaphysical anxiety is nourished by passage of time, then we, being more temporary, have more reasons to experience it than on the Old Continent*²⁷.

Tango – a song of Rio de la Plata²⁸

I HYBRIDAGE

(...) Millions of immigrants who came to this country in not quite a hundred years not only installed two attributes of the contemporary Argentinian, namely, disillusionment and sadness, but also prepared ground for the origin of the most original phenomenon of the del Plata region, which is the tango. This dance has been successively condemned and praised, satirised and analysed. Finally, its greatest author, Enrique Santos Discépolo, gave its most apt definition: it is a sad thing that one dances (...)

II DISSATISFACTION

(...) *All this is the reason why the tango is an introvertive or even introspective dance, a sad thing that one dances, in contrast to what takes place in other folk dances, which are extrovertive and erotic. Only a gringo would make a clown of himself by taking advantage of a tango for chat or amusement.*

The tango is a totally astonishing phenomenon from the viewpoint of the genre of folk dance in general.

Some maintain that the tango is not always dramatic and that upon occasions it displays humour. In doing so they seem to be suggesting that the tango can be light-hearted. This appears to me to be quite incorrect since we are actually dealing with concealed satire. The humour of the tango has something of Argentinian contrariness, and its epigrams are angry and grim.

Hard work all day

And on a Saturday evening you're a lord.

The face of the Argentinian displays a caricature irony of sorts. When a Neapolitan dances the tarantella he does so for fun; when a porteño dances the tango he ponders his plight, as a rule personified by his partner, or tries to resolve and delve into the general structure of human existence. A German, drunk on beer and skipping to the rhythm of Tyrolean music, laughs and innocently enjoys himself; a porteño does not laugh or have fun, and if sometimes he unthinkingly and furtively smiles his grotesque grimace differs from the laughter of the German just like a pessimistic hunchback differs from a gym teacher. (...)

III SEX

(...) Assorted Argentinian thinkers identified the tango with sex or, as in the case of Juan Pablo Echagüe, simply described it as lascivious. I believe that we are dealing with quite the opposite. True, the tango came into being in dives, but already this fact should produce suspicion that this is a case of some sort of a re-

verse, because artistic creativity is almost always an antagonist act, an attempted escape or rebellion. The imagination thus creates something that is absent, an object of our longing and hope, something which will magically make it possible for us to free ourselves from our harsh daily reality. (...)

IV

(...) The body of another person is a mere object and contact with its matter does not entitle to cross the boundaries of loneliness. The sexual act is thus doubly sad, since it not only leaves man amidst his previous loneliness, but intensifies it and the frustration of the effort. This is one of the mechanisms that could explain the sadness of the tango, so full of despair, anger, threats, and sarcasm. (...)

V BANDONEON

(...) From the brothels and the dives the tango set out to conquer the city centre together with a barrel organ and a parrot, which innocently and blatantly proclaimed:

I would like to become a scoundrel,
So as to possess a girl.

And with invincible force, that characteristic feature of authentic expression, the tango took the world. (...)

VI METAPHYSICS

(...) In this country of oppositionists each time when someone plans or creates something (a budget, a symphony or a housing project) there immediately emerge thousands of critics who with sadistic scrupulousness destroy everything. (...)

(...) The mentioned critics find metaphysics only in volumes by German professors, while, as Nietzsche said, it lies in the streets, in the entrails of the ordinary man. (...) Inevitable frustration, nostalgia for a distant homeland, the hostile attitude of the indigenous population towards the invasion, uncertainty and frailness in a rapidly changing world, the incapability to ensure a living, and the absence of absolute hierarchies – all this is expressed in metaphysical tango-istics.

In one swoop the concrete destroyed
The old neighbourhood – my birthplace.

Progress, forcefully introduced by the leaders of new Argentina, did not leave a stone unturned; more, it did not leave a brick unturned since technically that material is less durable. A fact that is even more depressing.

There is nothing permanent in this ghost town.

A folk poet describes his nostalgia for the old Cafe de los Angelitos:

I evoke you, lost in life and suffused in clouds of smoke.

In turn, the humbler, suburban Manrique asks:
What dreams did they pursue?
On what stars do they wander?
Those voices that came yesterday
and passed and fell silent.
Where are they today?
Along which streets will they return?

The porteño, as no European can, experiences the passage of time and the fact that the frustration of all his dreams and ultimate death are an unavoidable epilogue of all efforts. Muddled, leaning on a marble table-top amidst glasses of “semillon”** and the smoke of “negros” cigarettes, he asks in the throes of friendly meditation:

Brother, do you remember those beautiful times?

And concludes with cynical bitterness:

Life flows, departs, and never returns,
It is thus best to enjoy it, and may all cares
Go to the devil. (...)

The man of the tango is, therefore, a creature who meditates about the passage of time and that which it brings: unrelenting death.

* porteño – a resident of Buenos Aires

** cheap popular wine.

Time for putting things in order: *Wdech-wydech* is enclosed in the poetic of the extravertic tango. *Tango* is by the very nature of things introvertic. We are well aware of the differences between the phantom qualities of Buenos, Łódź, Warsaw...

Once we had already become acquainted with the structure of the tango we can return to the whole of Rybczyński's statement (previously cut short and deprived of the last sentence):

(...) *First there comes construction and technology, and only later do they become surrounded with meanings and produce an ambiance. THE CONTENT IS ETERNAL AND COMMON FOR ALL PEOPLE.*

*In one swoop the concrete destroyed
The old neighbourhood – my birthplace...*

What dreams did they pursue?
On what stars do they wander?
Those voices that came yesterday
and passed and fell silent.
Where are they today?
Along which streets will they return?

The sad thought dancing in Kantor's play, in Mrozek's drama, and in Rybczyński's film is different. The same is true for the sad thought dancing in *Tango*, *Wdech-wydech*, *Orchestra*, *Manhattan*, and *Washington*.

THE CONTENT IS ETERNAL AND COMMON FOR ALL PEOPLE.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Wdech-wydech* (1981), scenario, photography, direction: Bogdan Dziworski and Zbigniew Rybczyński, music: Janusz Hajdun, producer Ryszard Okuński, production SeMaFor (for Polish Television).
- ² *Tango* (1980), direction: Zbigniew Rybczyński, cooperation: Janina Dychto, Andrzej Teodorczyk, Andrzej Strąk. Janusz Olszewski, Zygmunt Smyczek, Wiesław Nowak, Halina Krajewska, music: Janusz Hajdun, sound: Mieczysław Janik, editing: Barbara Sarnocińska, producer: Ryszard Okuński, Ignacy Goncerz, production: SeMaFor.
- ³ *Zbigniew Rybczyński podróżnik do krainy niemożliwości*, ed. Zbigniew Benedyktowicz, cooperation Teresa Rutkowska, Ryszard Ciarka, Warszawa 1993.
- ⁴ Cf., i.a. my introduction to an issue of "Konteksty" (no. 3/4 1992) on the anthropology of film and a whole issue containing pertinent texts. Cf. also: *Sztuka na wysokości oczu. Film i antropologia* Warszawa 1991.
- ⁵ Charles Solomon, "Tango" - polski taniec alienacji, transl. Teresa Rutkowska, in: *Zbigniew Rybczyński podróżnik...*, op. cit., p. 37.
- ⁶ Jean-Paul Fargier, *Jak Polak*, transl. Teresa Rutkowska, ibid., pp. 44-45.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Marcin Giżycki, *Wizja i kalkulacja*, ibid., pp. 28-29.
- ⁹ Daniel Szczuchura, *Tango, czyli nowe spojrzenie na kino*, ibid., pp. 34-35.
- ¹⁰ Statement made during a press conference in the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences, subsequently repeated in interviews and the press.
- ¹¹ Janusz Bogucki in a conversation: *Emaus za dużo czy za mało wolności?*, "Konteksty" no. 1/1992, p. 29.
- ¹² Cf. an account of an interview given in "Interview Magazine", in: *Zbigniew Rybczyński – podróżnik...*, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
- ¹³ Jan Kott, *Rodzina Mroźka*, "Dialog" no. 4/1965, pp. 68-73.
- ¹⁴ Roch Sulima, *Przyczynek do semiotyki śmieci*, "Konteksty" no. 1/1993, p. 33.
- ¹⁵ *Zbigniew Rybczyński - podróżnik...*, op. cit., p. 67.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 189-190.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 200.
- ¹⁸ Cf. an interview with Mroźek held by Jerzy Jarocki, in which the author admitted that the first play to make a great impression on him was *Wesele*, "Teatr" no. 4/1994.
- ¹⁹ Jan Kott, op. cit.
- ²⁰ Jan Błoński, *Drugie danie czyli powtórka poczwórki*, "Dialog" no. 5/168, p. 70.
- ²¹ Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *Teatr Śmierci Tadeusza Kantora*. Verba/Chotomów 1990, p. 114.
- ²² Magdalena Smęder, "Betlejem, Golgota, Bastylia i Biedny Pokój", "Konteksty" no. 3-4/1991, p. 123.
- ²³ Ryszard Ciarka, *Zbigniew Rybczyński podróżnik...*, op. cit., p. 169.
- ²⁴ Ibid., graphic insert.
- ²⁵ Ernesto Sabato, *Pisarz i jego zmyły*, coll., transl. and afterword Rajmund Kalicki, Kraków 1988; idem, *Tango piosenka rioplateńska*, "Literatura" 12, no. 12, 20 March 1975, p. 11. I would like to thank Mr. Rajmund Kalicki for his kind help in locating this essay, which I recalled but without pertinent bibliographic data.
- ²⁶ Ernesto Sabato, *Pisarz i jego zmyły*, p. 68.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ I introduced caption numbers due to a new arrangement of the fragments.

Zbigniew Rybczyński, drawing to *Tango*

DARIUSZ CZAJA

Fragmentary Presences. Portraits of Carlo Gesualdo

*Ideal and dearly beloved voices
of those who are dead, or of those
who are lost to us like the dead.*

*Sometimes they speak to us in our dreams;
sometimes in thought the mind hears them.*

*And for a moment with their echo other echoes
return from the first poetry of our lives -
like music that extinguishes the far-off night.*

Constantine Cavafy, *Voices*¹

He died.

The prince died.

Prince Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa died.

The ultimate deathbed chord of this biography resounded on 8 September 1613.

The funeral ceremonies had been celebrated, the body laid to rest in a grave, the book of life is closed.

Evoking already at the very onset, and in such a demonstrative manner, the conventionalised metaphor of the book of life shut for always – and announced by repeating the word: “died” thrice – I would like to draw attention not so much to the simple and obvious (?) fact of the biological end as to clearly and firmly accentuate a frustrating circumstance, namely, that contrary to all appearances in the eyes of the living the cognitive situation connected with recreating and naming the “truth” about the finally ended existence of the prince of Venosa does not change for the better. Despite the fact that this book of life has been already granted a last chapter and that it has a definite epilogue that cannot be corrected, the meaning of the biography still refuses to arrange itself into a legible pattern.

Carlo Gesualdo disappeared irretrievably and will no longer answer any of the questions of interest to us. Nor will he resolve the doubts intriguing us. The fact that his voice became silent for always in a mental and cultural situation so distant from ours multiplies problems even more. We are left only with traces of his life,

traces of various cognitive significance that have to be now subjected to laborious interpretations. Let us, therefore, ask: who really died on that day, month and year? Who was the person described in a seventeenth-century dictionary as: *Nobilissimus Carolus Gesualdus, Princeps Venusinus, nostrae tempestatis Musicorum ac Melopaeorum, princeps?* Who was Carlo Gesualdo?

This disturbing mystery of identity is the topic of the following text.

Voices from the past

The concept of a facial composite belongs, as we know, to the dictionary of criminal studies. In situations of particular threat the police draftsman, basing himself on the testimonies of eyewitnesses, executes a portrait of the felon in accordance with certain accepted routines. Such a drawing, often a painstaking attempt at the coordination and synchronisation of assorted, at times contradictory observations now pieced together is to become a reliable likeness of the perpetrator pursued by the law. It is intended to be his recognisable portrait. The end effect is thus a resultant of the percipience and memory of the witnesses and the talent and skills of the draftsman. Arrest warrants containing the portrait are dispatched in pursuit of the living (although sometimes in the course of the search they become the dead), making it possible – in both cases – to verify this type of collective work. We can, therefore, assess the degree of the proximity between the depiction and the designate, between the likeness and the person whom it was supposed to represent. In other words, the value of this cognitive method can be easily verified by means of a simple comparison.

This is an uncomplicated model situation. Real problems appear when the construction of such a portrait from memory – regardless whether comprehended literally (visually) or figuratively (rhetorically) – involves a person from the past who, in addition, lived several hundred years ago. Then the degree of complications relating to its execution suddenly grows and the possibilities of verification leave, euphemistically speaking, much to desire. How can we reach the truth about a person from the distant past? Which historical testimonies should we trust, and why? In what manner will our suppositions become legitimate? Finally, how and, predominantly, is it at all possible to achieve a facial composite of an historical figure? At this point it appears appropriate to recollect the concept of a facial composite. It is difficult to resist the impression that in the case of a reconstruction of a biography from the past the work conducted by an historian resembles that of a detective, while interpretations unambiguously bring to mind a trial based on circumstantial evidence. Only by following traces left behind by memory can we come close to solving the mystery of identity.

Apparently, it is precisely this sort of difficulty tackled by historians-detectives – both nominal² and self-proclaimed – who had tried or still attempt to “draw” a portrait of Prince Carlo Gesualdo of Venosa from a perspective of 400 years. In this case, the detective metaphor assumes all the traits of literalness. Keep in mind: the goal is to create a convincing and adequate facial composite of a composer and ... murderer. Now for a closer look at several contemporary procedures of rendering his likeness indelible.

One of the most fascinating “research” hypotheses intent on revealing the mystery of the life of Carlo Gesualdo is the television documentary by Werner Herzog: *Death for Five Voices* (1995).³ From the very first scenes Herzog convinces us that he is acting in the manner of a genuine documentarian. We are thus offered numerous photographs from “visiting the site of crime” and of places connected with Gesualdo’s life, competent musicologists provide a specialist commentary to his musical *oeuvre*, and professional singers perform his madrigals (*Il Complesso Barocco* under Alan Curtis, *The Gesualdo Consort* under Gerald Place). Everything falls into place according to the well-tested scenario for a documentary film about an artist: some material about his life and a presentation of his works – enough not to bore the viewer and shown preferably interchangeably so that this compilation might generate a pattern as legible as possible and offer a convincing portrait of the artist resurrected thanks to the director’s knowledge, intuition and skill.

Basically, this is the scheme applied by Herzog. He would have not been himself, however, if had he not, apart from resolving the mystery of Gesualdo, added a few new puzzles. Nothing is unambiguous and the film lacks straight lines. It is time, therefore, to follow in detail the manner in which Herzog construed a portrait of Gesualdo and arrived at the truth.

In *Death for Five Voices* the lead parts are actually played by voices. This does not, however, as the title may suggest, involve madrigals for five voices composed by Gesualdo or the voices of singers heard upon several occasions in the film. From the viewpoint of a reconstruction of life events the foremost factor are the voices of a number of characters building the protagonist’s facial composite, the intriguing and memorable polyphony of Herzog’s document. Let us for a moment disturb the chronology of the film so as to present two sequences of voices composing two versions of Gesualdo, two portraits: the first reconstructs the life of the composer, and the other concentrates on his music. Kaleidoscopic narration contains several significant figures creating a rather picturesque group of experts bringing us closer to the meanders of the life of the prince of musicians.

In view of the fact that Gesualdo’s greatest passion was music it does not come as a surprise that

Herzog chose his witnesses from among professionals. The chief narrator of the film story about Gesualdo is Gerald Place, a musicologist, expert on the prince’s music, and conductor of *The Gesualdo Consort*, who recalls and relates in the manner of an encyclopaedic archivist assorted basic facts from the composer’s biography.

Musicologist I: *As musicians working at the end of the twentieth century we can’t help but recognise Gesualdo as a kind of a musical visionary. Looking back there seems to be a whole gap between the end of Gesualdo’s life and Wagner and that kind of late nineteenth-century Romantic writing. There is really nothing in between and it seems very strange to us. This amazing music comes out of an awfully amazing life story. And it was this life story, the biography that first led musicians to look at Gesualdo at all. And had his life not been so extraordinary (my emphasis – M.C.) perhaps we may not even now be bothering to look at his music. Philip Heseltine, an English scholar better known by his pseudonym of Peter Warlock, became so involved with Gesualdo, he edited a lot of his music. It was he that first saw it as a kind of prefiguration of Wagner. He got so involved that he actually thought he was Gesualdo and became so deranged he committed suicide. So Gesualdo has all sorts of influences now across the centuries. He was born in 1560 or 1561, we think, and his elder brother died when he was 19 so Gesualdo himself became prince of Venosa. And this was the point when he was already writing a lot of music and already become involved as a composer. And perhaps his duties as prince formed a conflict with his interest as an amateur musician. The fact that he was an amateur musician is very significant because he was able to do things for himself. He didn’t have to please a patron, he could follow whatever line musically he wanted. 1586 saw his marriage to Maria d’Avalos, who was one of the most beautiful women of her time. In fact it’s been suggested that she was the model for Leonardo’s *Giaconda*. By the time Gesualdo married her she’d already been widowed twice. ... The source describes her husband’s death as an excess of connubial bliss ... Soon after a son was born to Gesualdo and Donna Maria, and then things took a nasty turn. An uncle of Gesualdo’s, who was a cardinal in fact, started making advances to Donna Maria. And he discovered that in fact somebody else was interested in her - Fabrizio Carafa, the most noble, eligible duke of his generation. Naturally, the uncle was exceedingly jealous and went straight to Gesualdo and told him all the details. Gesualdo’s reaction was to plan a murder.*

In turn, the statements made by Alan Curtis (Musicologist II) mainly contain the motif of Gesualdo’s brilliance and originality:

It’s not a coincidence that the same music critics who call Gesualdo’s music incompetent and the work of an amateur are themselves usually incompetent amateurs.... It is the great composers of our century who have recognised the great genius of Gesualdo, above all, perhaps, Stravin-

sky who admired Gesualdo's music so much that he even made two pilgrimages to Gesualdo, to the village, to see the castle.

In this posthumous debate an opinion is also expressed by an Historian, who confirms Gesualdo's genius and extraordinary life with foremost emphasis on the irremovable presence of biographical motifs in his *oeuvre* (especially from a later period):

In this castle Carlo Gesualdo spent the last 16 years of his life in total solitude and hideous torment, torn from within, pursued by furies and demons. He was an artist of the highest rank. He had a touch of genius anticipating an artistic movement, which did not develop until the beginning of our own century, namely, Expressionism. In madrigals, his favourite art form, he expressed his innermost being, his entire inner world steeped in delusion and madness. He seemed persecuted by furies and demons (my emphasis – D. C.). Gesualdo died here. There are two versions of his death. According to the first he died of asthma. According to the second, however, his death was caused by excessive torture. He maintained a staff of about twenty servants whose task it was to subject him to continuous whippings. The injuries, which he suffered from these painful flagellations caused infections that finally led to his death. We don't know that [he was a masochist] for certain. According to some stories I heard he was. I do know that one of his servants had to spend every night with him in bed ... allegedly to keep him warm.

Musicologist I also underlines the enormous suffering of the composer in the last years of his life. Interestingly, in doing so he uses the same expression as the historian: *After the murder things settled down again. There was no trial; it was deemed a justified act. And this began an intensive period of musical activity for Gesualdo. All the music that's come down to us was after the murder. ... We know very little about the last 16 years of his life. He became a recluse in his castle, deep in melancholy, haunted by demons* (my emphasis - D. C.), racked by remorse and self-accusation. In 1611 his last book of madrigals, his sixth book was published and then in 1613 he died.

There also appears a Worker employed at the castle, whom the camera finds busy in the ruins of Gesualdo Castle. Gap-toothed, he invites the viewer inside by citing a refrain from Dante (*Lasciate ogni speranza....*) and unconsciously (?) assumes the role of Charon guiding us in one of the infernal circles: *Abandon hope all ye who enter here. I work here alone. Nobody else wants to work here. There's a curse weighing down on this castle. A mad woman from the asylum in Venosa haunts this place now. Elsewhere: Come along, let me show you what he did after he killed his wife ... The whole valley once looked like this. Everything was green covered with woods, and he cut everything down. He was afflicted with the most horrible insanity ... All by himself, without any help from anybody. It took him] about two or three months, for sure.*

The remarks about the prince's insanity are confirmed and commented on by the erudite Musicologist I. Life astonishingly becomes combined with literature, as if events from the life of Gesualdo prefigured an episode from a Shakespearean tragedy: *Gesualdo had to flee immediately ... and we hear that he started to cut down the forest. It sounds like something out of Macbeth. As if the forest was some kind of a threat to him. And worse, he had to kill or killed his second child because he was convinced that it was the product of this illicit union.*

And vice versa. Now the musicologist's laconic statement devoid of details is supplemented by the castle Worker: *They say Gesualdo decided to let his second child die because he suspected it wasn't his child. He told his servants to put the little boy on a swing hanging from a balcony [he points] ... back there. They had to keep the child swinging violently for three days and three nights. He brought in choirs, which had to sing there [points again], in the background, on either side of the arch. They kept on singing until the child was dead. ... A madrigal about the beauty of death.*

The worker's statement is confirmed by a Piper wandering around the ruined chambers without any obvious purpose. Asked about his presence in the castle he answers with fear, if not slight madness in his eyes: *I come here once a week to play music here into these holes and cracks. Because there is an evil spirit haunting this place. The spirit is Gesualdo's.*

The motif of the haunted, cursed place becomes even more intensive after the appearance of the earlier announced Mad Woman of Venosa caught unawares by the camera when, carrying a portable tape recorder, she hides in the abandoned castle interiors: *I am the reincarnation of Maria d'Avalos, Gesualdo's wife. I belong to this place. My room is up there and our kitchens are down here ... He composed it [the music] shortly before he committed the murders. He refused to speak. He just dropped dark hints. The last time he spoke to me about ten days before the murder. And he said: death alone can kill. He didn't say a word after that. He just sang eerie songs. (...) I live in heaven, but you can find me with a helicopter if you fly around the big chandelier in the La Scala opera house in Milan. In the second row right by the pillar there is a box all clad in red damask. That's where I live.*

In an extremely expressive and, at the same time, enormously funny scene in a kitchen we come across yet another piece of evidence. Two Cooks - husband and wife - talk about Gesualdo's wedding and accentuate, understandably, the culinary motif. The conversation recalls a typical quarrel of a married couple in which the function, quite literally, of *advocatus diaboli* is assumed by the wife interfering into the story recounted by the master cook:

*He: Gesualdo worked miracles for this wedding.
She: Who is this Gesualdo, anyway – a devil?*

He: No, he could afford it. And beyond that, he was very demanding. He was very rich. 125 courses for a 1000.

She: He was a devil, this Gesualdo, a devil incarnate! (...)

He: One of the courses was quail (...). There were as many as twenty baby goats grilled, just imagine (...) As it turns out, Gesualdo was cuckolded (...).

This demonic motif is present and expanded in a statement made by the warden of a certain Neapolitan palace. In response to questions he answers from a glassed-in control room: *He lived on the ground floor [he points]. It was here the double murder of the wife and her lover took place. That night was very chaotic. All sorts of things happened. On these stairs a monk even raped the corpse of Gesualdo's wife. It had been done over there. As we know Gesualdo was a demon and an alchemist. However, he was certainly highly intelligent ... He experimented on human bodies as well. The victims' skeletons are still on exhibit in San Severo's chapel just around the corner...*

The Archivist confirms the alchemical interests of the composer from Venosa. Assuming the pose of a serious museum expert he presents the museum exhibits on show: *One of them will certainly interest you. This disk here in the display case. It comes from the personal possessions of Prince Carlo Gesualdo. This is confirmed by a document I would like to show you. It is a letter to his alchemist personally signed by Gesualdo and offering him a large sum of money, an enormous amount in those days, to enlist his aid in deciphering all these mysterious signs. The prince had spent sleepless nights trying to unravel these strange symbols. In the course of this activity he became lost in a labyrinth of conjectures and hypotheses. He almost lost his reason in the process but he never came to a conclusion.*

This litany of in extenso cited opinions calls for critical commentary.

First, consider the sort of film we are watching. It certainly – and this is our first reaction – is not a feature movie. If the latter is to denote a film referring to fictional characters and telling about events first conceived by the author of the scenario then Herzog's film is certainly a document, which, regardless of assorted classifications, deals in one way or another with reality existing outside the screen. At the same time, it does not always reflect, imitate or copy (whatever these verbs are supposed to mean) faithfully. Nonetheless, it refers to a reality that existed in the past and whose existence is indisputable. Reasoning in this way we accept that there really did live a Carlo Gesualdo and a Maria d'Avalos, that their tragedy is not literary fiction but historical reality confirmed by documents, and that the prince's music was not composed *post factum* nor is it a hallucination. We agree that the film,

despite the fact that, for obvious reasons, it does not show actual persons, is not a reference to a world of fiction. It does, however, contain certain signals that compel us to not so much doubt the purely documentary record (assuming that this "purity" is not a figment of the imagination) as to subject the identification to certain retouching.

Take the scene at the castle with the auburn-haired mad woman. Initially, this sequence contains a discernible documentary record, and authenticity is underscored by means of a hand-held camera if it were not for the fact that a moment later the glance of an expert recognises that the part of the insane woman is played by the celebrated Italian singer Milva. In other words, the scene is not, as could be assumed, a direct record "of reality" but pure creation by the director (naturally, performed by an actor). If this is the case then our caution has been stirred to such a degree that we may deliberate whether other scenes (for instance, the one with the piper or the psychiatrist) had not been created by applying the same method. Obviously, this is not a charge levelled against Herzog but solely an attempt at additionally defining his strategy. Documentarians are familiar with the expression "staged documentary", which means that not all scenes reflect existing reality, "the sort that truly exists", but some have been evoked by the intervention of the director.

Hence the question: what is the sense of such fictionalisation of a documentary? Why would a director introduce an obviously created scene into the actual (at the topographic and musical level) scenery of the film? In other words: what is the purpose of the masquerade involving the mad woman, mentioned here by way of example? Apparently, the only sensible answer is that this is one of the film's intentionally applied rhetorical strategies.⁴ Herzog introduced the scene to enhance the effect of persuasion or, more precisely, to win the viewer over to his vision of the lead protagonist.

Who is Herzog's Gesualdo? Note at the onset that he strangely resembles other characters from this director's film catalogue. What did Herzog accentuate in the first place? The predominant emphasis is on Gesualdo's total and radical otherness, distinctness *vis a vis* the surrounding world of the period, etymologically comprehended eccentricity and exoticism. Herzog discovered a trait probably best expressed by the German term: *unheimlichkeit*, the uncanny. Suffice to recall that such a characteristic could be easily applied in the case of many other earlier fictional characters filmed by Herzog: Fitzcarraldo, Aguirre, Woyzzek, Kaspar Hauser... The overall impression suggests that his whole filmography gravitates towards a single type of protagonists, especially those who transgress the frame of normalcy, i.e. that, which is domesticated and native, who decidedly, albeit for different rea-

sons, transcend the framework of the so-called normal world and, finally, whose biography has “branded” them. Herzog examines them with the passion of a true botanist studying a new specimen in his herbarium and attempting to describe its original features. Or to put it differently: he observes with interest and tries to understand the rules of this “strange” life and those that support a model of existence totally at odds with the universal one; in this case: artist and murderer!

If this identification is apt then one can go on to say that Herzog’s film rhetoric underlines in the Gesualdo character predominantly the motif of insanity. This is the purpose served by conspicuous remarks referring to his “real” biography and by all scenes, regardless whether staged or not, that are to render this recognition more profound and accentuated. I have in mind, by way of example, the above-mentioned scene with the insane female singer and the genuinely funny (sic!) fragment about new ways (horse-riding) of treating mental illnesses. The same purpose is served by the cited statements about the killing of a child, cutting down trees in a whole valley, or flagellation on the verge of deviation. In the film Herzog suggested distinctly that almost everything that is connected with Gesualdo is part of a range of madness and that many people - even years later - who had contact with him, were interested in him or wrote about him became stamped by the irremovable stigmata of insanity.

To this opinion we must add the extremely definite motif of Gesualdo’s demonism.⁵ It comes to the fore in the farcical scene with the cooks and the street theatre enacted (here still in the buffo convention) in the locality of Gesualdo, the recurring refrain about the persecution of the prince in the closing years of his life by “demons and furies”, and tales about his anatomical experiments and alchemical quests. With unconcealed predilection Herzog enjoys a motif straight out of a Gothic tale, together with abandoned and haunted castle ruins and the palace of Prince d’Avalos filmed in such a way as to grant it the features of a haunted residence familiar from Romantic horror stories.

Both motifs are the whole time counterpointed by declarations made by musicologists stressing Gesualdo’s pioneering achievements and insufficiently appreciated musical genius, but the rhetorical construction of the film is such that it accentuates first and foremost the two mentioned elements of his likeness as if Gesualdo’s demonism and insanity were the object of knowledge while his musical genius had to be believed (unless his works were heard first). It could be said that the “dark” side of the portrait is shown directly, while the “light” one possesses only a declarative status.

Yet another obvious feature of the film: notice that Herzog built Gesualdo’s portrait out of numerous opinions. This is a truly polyphonic documentary construc-

tion and there would be nothing surprising in it were it not for the fact that all voices are arranged upon the same level and that the author openly legitimizes the cognitive status of assorted languages. Suffice to notice that the reconstruction of the lead character attaches importance to routine historical and musicological discourse although the vernacular, the language of the legend or folk apocrypha is just as essential. Each, Herzog seems it be saying, contains a certain particle of truth about the protagonist. Naturally, in such an attempt at revealing the truth about the film character the director resorted to a strategy familiar to the cinema. A paradigmatic example of its application is Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane*, and a parody remake can be found in Woody Allen’s *Zelig*. Recall that the employed cognitive method consisted of reaching the “core of the truth” by constructing a biography out of assorted points of view and, more precisely, the multiplication of numerous perspectives, their contrast and confrontation and, as a consequence, the creation of a photographic “multiple portrait”. But this is not to say – and the case of *Citizen Kane* leaves no doubt!⁶ – that we have attained a situation in which a multi-voice portrait ideally overlaps the portrayed person.

In the case of Herzog this film obviousness has its not so evident side. Note that in both mentioned films the persons interrogated in order to determine the truth about the protagonist (it makes no difference that he is fictional) knew him personally, kept him company, talked with him, in a word: dealt with him in one way or another. Meanwhile, in Herzog’s documentary film the worker, the keeper or the cook – whose opinions resemble somewhat, naturally *toutes proportions gardées*, a classical chorus commenting on the fate of the tragic hero – talk about Gesualdo, born more than 400 years ago, almost as if he had been their acquaintance or at least someone whom they knew well. The time chasm between them vanishes in an amazingly easy manner! After hearing several statements we are willing to almost believe that the story took place “yesterday” or at least during the lifetime of the interlocutors. The past has been included into the present right in front of our eyes. Gesualdo appears to be “lifelike” and his story proves to be palpably present while we, the spectators, are drawn into the range of its direct impact.

Ultimately, the portrait of Carlo Gesualdo executed by Herzog is a resultant of assorted voices (including those that sing) and poetics. This is an openly hybrid and non-cohesive likeness. Apparently, Herzog reports rather than explains. He assumes the position more of an understanding listener than an exegete. If I am right he is more interested in the life of the artist than the *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, the selection of voices and their exposition, the arrangement of the accents and the configuration in the film narration are not an



innocuous venture. All elements belong undoubtedly to the domain of persuasion. To put it still differently: Herzog does not film reality but his perception of it. His portrait of Gesualdo betrays the distinctive “hand-writing” of its author.

The film strategy adopted by Herzog is also unclear and inconsistent. On the one hand, it seems that he is moved by the biography of his protagonist - otherwise, why would he even embark upon it? – and tries to understand the motifs of his activity, to reach the prince’s “heart of darkness” while multiplying assorted voices and interpretations. He acts in the manner of a scientist who gathers “documents” (biographical and musicological) and perhaps also an anthropologist who places his trust in the power of collective imagination, the apocryphal legendary stories repeated years later. On the other hand, Herzog includes openly fictional episodes subjectivising the narration and placing it on the side of “make belief”; more, in several places the very way in which he films betrays an ironic approach. This time the director seems to have been amusing himself (and the audience) with stories about the strange life of Gesualdo, brimming with bizarre scenes, and with contemporary memory about him. In those fragments the tragedy and burden of Gesualdo’s life

and art vanish in the unbearable lightness of staged episodes, and the whole presented story turns out to be material for a play that could appear at best as part of the Grand Guignol repertoire. If we were to forget for an instant that we are dealing with a documentary then Herzog’s film, a genuine “short film about killing”, could be regarded as belonging to the thriller genre or as a crime story with elements of the macabre.

Within this context the two last scenes appear to be emblematic. In the first, the musicologist Alan Curtis formulates sentences intended as a summary of the story about the musician and the murderer:

There is still much risk taking and I think that’s one of the clues to Gesualdo. Performers must also take risks and be dangerous and then the beauty of this wild music comes forth. Magnificent, powerful words that cannot be treated otherwise than seriously. Only a moment later, in the closing scene, a young man playing the part of a character from a colourful historical spectacle uses a cell phone while facing the audience: *The Gesualdo film will be finished any moment now anyway.* This is a clear-cut meta-textual message, somewhat akin to the director winking at us. Herzog seems to be saying: “Don’t treat all this seriously, that what you have seen has just as much in common with historical truth as a masquerade enacted in front of your eyes, a special

occasion for dressing up in an historical costume". He also appears to be following the recommendation in Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, a fascinating story in which the narrator - just as Herzog - tries to recreate out of numerous sources of information a biography of his half-brother, a recently deceased man of letters: keep in mind that whatever people say the story is actually composed of three strata. First, the storyteller shapes the message, which is then distorted by the listener in his own manner, while the dead protagonist conceals the truth from both of them.⁷ The irony of the title of Nabokov's book is obvious: the real life of Sebastian Knight is inaccessible for cognitive operations. Here, "real" means "false" and we can find out but a little about the writer's "real life" since he evades us the whole time - an excellent use of the ambiguity of the English word: *knight* - in the manner of a chess-piece.

We cannot exclude that Herzog's documentary is ultimately a confession to having been defeated, a declaration that a credible portrait of an historical figure is a cognitive chimera. This is, however, only a supposition. Just as there is probably no satisfactory answer to the question whether the above-mentioned inconsistency was an intentional premise on the part of the director or whether it comprises a certain "added value" in the film.

The mystery of identity

Madrygal żalobny, a story by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, delves into the same topic as Herzog's film - the mystery of the life and music of Carlo Gesualdo. True, the medium is different - word, narration, literary fiction - but the main problem remains the same. A comparison of Herling's story with Herzog's documentary film - apart from the obviously identical lead character - could be extremely interesting and instructive for two reasons. First, the story originated in a diary kept by the author and not only does the fragment cited *in extenso* blend with the narration but the latter too is stylised to bring to mind a documentary record: the narrator unambiguously bears a resemblance to the author, a trick that - often applied by the "late" Herling - is to stress the para-documentary character of the story. Secondly, he noted with undisguised disgust in parentheses added years later and now already an integral component of the story: *Werner Herzog recently made the film: Gesualdo - Death for Five Voices, not very successful, with the exception of the music.*⁸

The tale about the composer from Venosa is part of a rather extraordinary love story. To put as concisely as possible: while in Naples the narrator made the acquaintance of a young music student named Anna Fiedotova, the daughter of a Russian father and a Polish mother. They share not only enchantment but predominantly a passion for the music and

person of Carlo Gesualdo. A motif of importance for the narration structure: Anna returns together with her dying father to St. Petersburg and from that moment her conversations with the narrator about the prince of musicians assume the form of correspondence. Understandably, Anna is more interested in Gesualdo's music, while the narrator - in the tragedy of Gesualdo's life, whose critical point is the murder of his wife.

The diary inserted into the story echoes the story of the murder of Maria d'Avalos committed by Gesualdo, known already from the filmed commentaries of musicologists, but now the accents are arranged differently. Herling distinctly emphasised moderation and tried to emulate the passionless style of a chronicle. Nor does he shock the reader with bluntness and construed his record in such a manner as to produce the impression that he was registering only facts. Here are fragments of the same albeit not the same story: *Carlo Gesualdo originated from an upstanding Neapolitan family, whose princely tile was connected with estates and castles in the region of Venosa, along the boundary between Apulia and Lucania (...) He married Maria d'Avalos of an equally honoured Neapolitan family. He was Maria's third husband. She had rapidly expedited the two previous spouses to the netherworld, having won the cognomen of "man-eater". Maria was considered to be the most beautiful woman in Naples and an embodiment of sensuality. The prince of Venosa was her senior and had two passions: music and the chase. Chroniclers of the period stressed the former, and in their opinion he made a mistake marrying such a fine-looking and temperamental woman since he was capable of only a single passion: Music (...) Occasionally, he did not venture into the marital bedroom for long stretches of time, and Maria - lonely and ablaze with anger - listened to the sound of instruments and the words of songs coming from the "workshop". He treated her as a tool for satisfying his rare "caprices" and for sexual distraction. Maria d'Avalos was considered the most beautiful woman in Naples, and the handsomest man was Fabrizio Carafa, "archangel" and the duke of Andria. Their affair instantly tuned into passion devoid of all restraint (...). This went on for as long as the prince, immersed in his madrigals, lived with his eyes closed. He opened them in 1590. On 16 October he feigned a hunting expedition and several hours after departure returned to the palace at midnight. Together with his secretary and three servants the prince burst into Maria's bedchamber. It follows from the evidence of witnesses that after the lovers were murdered by the prince and his entourage, the cuckolded husband returned from the threshold to the bedroom and crying out: "Non credo essere morta"! (I do not believe she is dead!) cut the corpse of his unfaithful wife with a short sword from groin to neck. Chronicles mention double frenzy: that of a betrayed husband who inflicts torment on the corpse of his wife and that of the two lovers,*

who on that night knew what awaited them and prepared for death in "an embrace of love".⁹

Herling tried to reconstruct the historical circumstances of the crime, accentuated Gesualdo's noble birth, and did not neglect to remark on his craving for music and the absence of passion for his wife, mentioning the exceptional cruelty of the crime, present also in the story told by Herzog, as an important detail. Here, Herling referred to chroniclers and witnesses but nowhere, neither in the diary nor in the story, did he cite the sources of his knowledge. According to the author, the historical, *ergo* authentic character of the confessions is to be testified by their language: non-literary, maintained in the style of a report, a purely chronicle-like statement. Facts, as it is said in similar situations, are to "speak for themselves".

The first important signal of the character's conception suggested in the story is the text of a brochure purchased in a Neapolitan antique shop and entitled: *La verita sul principe assassino*, issued several years after the prince's death and signed with a pseudonym. Here is a fragment cited by the author: *It is said that I loved music more than I did Maria; and that this became the cause of the tragedy. I refute with all the force of my pained (addolorato) heart. I have never loved anyone in my life as I did Maria from the very first meeting. Now I am not only the murderer of my wife and her lover. I am a widower doomed to the existence (may it be as brief as possible) of a living corpse. All that was my innermost self had died on 16 October 1590 (the day of the slaying). May God, beseeched by St. Charles Borromeo, take pity on the tormented soul of man who (I admit) wavered whether the terrible price of marital infidelity is not worth paying to save a woman beloved above all.*¹⁰ The fact that this apocryphal text is cited already at the beginning of the story is rather symptomatic and indicates the trend of the literary construction of Gesualdo's portrait. It shows that the narrator (author?)¹¹ openly rejected the objectivistic stand and resigned from meticulously weighing various assessments and arguments. On the contrary, he clearly betrays a willingness to defend Gesualdo and seeks circumstances justifying the crime. The ensuing exchange of letters accentuates this motif even stronger - the correspondence contains a highly emotional dispute about Gesualdo's true likeness.

The main problem in the polemic conducted *via* correspondence is the mystery of the murder and even more so: the perpetrator's special virulence - his return to the bedroom and the abuse of his wife's body. There emerge assorted explanations of this fact. Anna cites the renowned psychologist Litayev and proposes the following summary: *We cannot exclude that Carlo Gesualdo was as if killing himself, committing suicide driven by despair while torturing the dying or already dead wife with such passion and cruelty. Such cases, or similar ones,*

*occur rarely (...) in the tangled labyrinths of the human psyche: they can be described as "suicide via murder".*¹²

This sort of explication was totally repudiated by another psychological authority, Professor Marconi of Naples, whose expert opinion was cited in a letter sent by the narrator to St. Petersburg. The scholar replied: *I regard as absurd the notion of suicide in the form of murder, of killing oneself via another, murdered person. When Anna was still residing in Naples she came here sometimes and together we listened to music (...) and I always advised her to cease pursuing psychological quests and to limit herself to analysing the work. An artist is above all his work, and it is deceptive to sift through his biography. The truth is in the madrigals and not in the murder of her and her lover. I don't doubt that Carlo Gesualdo changed rather radically after this bloody incident because I am certain that the transformations left an imprint upon his oeuvre; it is there that they should be sought.*¹³

This reflection, expressed here with rare clarity and determination, claims that becoming acquainted with the nature of an artist possesses decisive and unquestionable primacy in the dispute: biography or *oeuvre*, life or works. This conviction will be later confirmed not only in the opinion of a cited (authentic) musical authority¹⁴, but also in a conceit that is the author's invention and according to which in the last years of his life Gesualdo composed the final madrigal: *Blessed Desired Death*, as if leaving his musical testament to the next generation. The thesis is clear-cut: upon a basis not subjected to rational analysis the artist is within his work that, in turn, is his true likeness in which the memory about him becomes petrified.

While preparing inventories aimed at facilitating the execution of a likeness of Carlo Gesualdo it is simply impossible to bypass the sole extant portrait of the prince, mentioned in the story and kept at the Capuchin monastery in Gesualdo. This painting appears in Herzog's film, first in fragments and then as a whole, although without any additional commentaries. Meanwhile, in Herling's story it fulfils a cognitively important function: *Carlo Gesualdo had the church and the adjoining monastery built in 1592. Sixteen years after his death they were expanded upon the request of a nephew of Pope Gregory XV, who married a niece of the Prince of Musicians. The painting is indeed a "pearl" for which a church "shell" was created. It is known as Il pardon di Carlo Gesualdo, and we know that the Prince of Musicians commissioned it from a Florentine (and rather average) painter named Balducci, but we cannot tell when it was commissioned and when the artist executed it just as it remains unknown who "forgave" whom. The title indicates that it was Carlo Gesualdo who "forgave" his unfaithful wife and her lover. But certain details of the painting indicate that it is he who asks for "forgiveness" for slaying the lovers. Quite possibly, the madrigalist intended the painting to be ambiguous. Let us not forget that his*

first madrigal, composed when he was a young man, was entitled: *Delicta nostra ne reminiscaris, Domine* /Remember not, Lord, our sins (offenses).¹⁵

Interestingly, according to the suggestion made by the narrator it is not the word but the music and the image that become the most credible witnesses of the biography. Both – and this is worth stressing – remain outside and above the word, as if Herling was saying: listen closely to Gesualdo's music and enter into this curious and inimitable world of sounds; listen to don Carlo's madrigals, especially the later ones, and look at the ambiguous likeness of the tormented prince – perhaps the truth about him hides beyond verbal constructions in the substance of sound and painterly form.

From the viewpoint of its structure *Madrygal żalobny* is composed – similarly as Herzog's film – of several heterogeneous elements. This "building block" construction demonstrates distinctive features of the absence of linearity.¹⁶ We are dealing with the aforementioned fragment of a diary or a fictional old print, accompanied by elements of a chronicle, an essay, a fragment of an authentic scientific dissertation, an ephrasis of Gesualdo's portrait and, at the end, a quasi-reportage with a scene of listening to the prince's music played on a portable CD player (borrowed from the scene with the mad woman of Venosa?). In contrast to Herzog's document, however, it is obvious that assorted elements are much better composed into the story and create a well-devised whole. The similarity of the two narrations is embedded in one basic fact: both apply in their cognitive strategies a combination of "truth" and "make-belief". Although the point of departure is composed of historical sources the two portraits rather ostentatiously introduce an admixture of fiction into the factographic material.

We should ask now: what sort of "truth" about Carlo Gesualdo did Herling defend? It follows quite clearly from the story that the prince's nature manifests itself not in the repulsive murder but in his music, the madrigals. Naturally, the author recorded the event described by chroniclers but did not discuss it in detail, and it is obvious that he did not perceive it as the prime issue of Gesualdo's story. The accents are arranged entirely differently. First and foremost, the narrator defends the thesis that contrary to facts and common sense the prince was uninterruptedly in love with his wife. In conversations with Włodzimierz Bolecki, Herling, already without resorting to the mask of a narrator declares outright: *The prince of Venosa was a very wealthy person (...) If he were concerned with money he could have married someone else, and thus the marriage to Maria d'Avalos must have been determined by profound love for her. The problem with describing his life consists of the fact that he was not only an aristocrat but also an artist; I found this just as captivating – an artist*

*and his private life. (...) I was attracted to the interpretation, expressed in the story by Anna F., that Gesualdo loved his wife very much and regretted his terrible deed but was forced to commit it by the customs of his epoch. This means that Gesualdo was a slave of the honour code of the period – he could not refuse to slay an unfaithful wife because he would have become a universally despised laughing-stock. The honour code is also associated with the fact that after killing his wife Gesualdo expected that the relatives of Maria's lover would take revenge since he had done so with the hands of his servants and not personally.*¹⁷

At this point there appears with great clarity the fundamental question of the principles of constructing a facial composite. How to produce a living, multi-sided and nuanced biography of a historical character? And in particular: how to construct a biography of an eminent person towering above his epoch so that it would not be schematic or succumb to standards binding in popular biographical literature. In his excellent comments on biographies Yuri Lotman indicated the numerous difficulties and traps awaiting the biographer. One of them is simplification: *A biographer as a rule selects a single line (presumably: dominating) and then describes it. The portrait gains expression and is cleansed of all contradictions but becomes schematic.*¹⁸ Apparently, Herling's hostility, not formulated outright, towards the "life" part of the Herzog documentary film comes from exactly such a conviction about the simplified and sensational character of the film story, the exaggerated emphasis on the scandalous dimension of the story about the prince of Venosa.

Nothing comes for free. The method of a contextual explanation of Gesualdo's deeds accepted by Herling is also not as innocent as it might appear and falls into a different trap awaiting the biographer and mentioned by Lotman who emphasized: *He who wishes to understand the life of an outstanding person faces a much more complex task. An interesting personality is not passive in reaction to the mass-scale psychology of its time. (...) The attitude of such a personality towards the psychological norms of the epoch resembles that of a poet towards grammar - norms originating from the outside are freely selected and creatively transposed. The historian is assisted by his habit of working with a literary text. And correctly so, since the life of Leonardo da Vinci, Pushkin, Blok or Mayakowski followed a course determined by laws governing creativity, resembling the labour of a sculptor working with a slab of granite – the resistance put up by the material is overcome by the force of creativity and obstacles change into art.*¹⁹ In other words, it is true that in this case a fragment is an element of a wider configuration, but such is its nature that even the most conscientious reconstruction of the whole cannot fully explain its idiomatic ontology. Taking into account Gesualdo's uniqueness can references to the context of the epoch

in order to “explain” the prince’s behaviour suffice as ultimate elucidation? The suggestion made by Lotman compels us to question such a solution.

Apart from the fact that the author of *Madrygal żalobny* pointed out the historical context as essential for understanding the crime committed by Gesualdo it is possible to discern something else in this obsessive motif of love: the mysterious radiation of a myth. Note: both in the story and his commentary Herling brought to life – albeit rather unintentionally – certain elements of the Orpheus myth, placing his protagonist within a mythical perspective and at the same time extremely perversely reinterpreting the myth. Recall how in the classical version the great musician and singer descends to the underworld in order to leave it with his dead wife - his love is supposed to shatter the gates of death. In the story, Gesualdo - Orpheus à rebours, so to speak - first murders his wife and then over a span of years, in an act of penitence and in the fashion of Orpheus, tries with his music, every note and line of the lyrics to restore her to life, to regain and extricate her from the land of silence. The words of the madrigals are greatly evocative: *Ardo per te, mio bene* (I burn for you, my love), *Cor mio, deh, non piangete* (My heart, ah, do not weep)... The unpredictable and frenzied chromatic of his music penetrates the boundary between life and death in an attempt at somehow infiltrating this wailing wall.

This is not the end. Herling provided an interesting commentary to Herzog’s film, but *Madrygal żalobny* also has an intriguing literary supplement. A rather little known story by the German author Wolfgang Hildesheimer with the enigmatic title: *Tynset* is a surprising commentary to Herling’s portrait of Gesualdo. Here, the figure of Carlo Gesualdo - whom the text describes significantly as the only murderer of his kind²⁰ – appears twice, each time unexpectedly, rather mysteriously, and without any earlier announcements. In this multi-strata text, subtly written in the form of an inner monologue, the narrator, suffering from insomnia, settles the accounts of his life. This kaleidoscope structure is a collage devoid of narrative cohesion – a variation on the theme of death. The peculiar locality of those fragmented reflections, conducted in a hallucinatory and unreal rhythm, is the narrator’s “white state”²¹, his bed. In Hildesheimer’s literary composition, built upon the basis of distinctly musical principles and with meticulously calculated returns of significant motifs, the titular *Tynset* (the name of a small Norwegian town) plays a special role. On the realistic level it is the desired and never realised destination of the narrator’s journey, while on the level of the metaphor it proves to be a cryptonym of the murkiness of the world, the impossibility of taking a look “behind the curtain”. It is another name of a metaphysically comprehended puzzle.²² As I have mentioned, the

prince of Venosa appears in the story twice. The first fragment is a detailed depiction of the murder scene, intentionally omitted by Herling. This is an attempt at a return to the past, a verbal depiction of the horror of a tragedy that took place at the time. The second fragment is a successive – and totally different than Herling’s – literary attempt at recreating the final moments in the life of the composer:

Here I lie, on a cold November night, on a bed on which murder had been committed on another November night - on this bed on which ten years after the murder the perpetrator laid having returned to the crime scene and the bed of the crime, unthreatened with an inquiry and protected by his rank, on the bed on which lies the murderer, Don Carlo Gesualdo, prince of Venosa, in the last years of his life, restless, rejecting slumber, indifferent to matters of life, suffering, variants of love, and even his sin, discouraged, without solace, half-glancing at God, on this bed, on which lies the murderer, Don Carlo Gesualdo, on his last nights, whose thoughts turn to God while desiring forgiveness, on which lies the murderer Carlo on his last night, impatiently and futilely awaiting a single word from his Creator -

- I am not saying that the Creator should say that word, no, this is not what I am saying –

- on this bed on which lies the divine Gesualdo in his last hour, already absent, a stranger to this world, to everything, also his Creator, all alone, he lies in his last hour and the black, restless eyes in his El Grecoesque face are not dimmed but deeply penetrate space (...)

Don Gesualdo lies and listens, and behind him lies his lute, although not in the gently dimmed harmony of a Dutch still life but angry, with sudden outbursts of animosity, cast aside after the last dissonance and wounded, perforated, upside down, with the keyboard at the bottom, the chessboard of his aroused and dangerous fingers, those seismographs of his cruelty, the servant of his unpredictable will and caprices, *while in another chamber, which no one had entered for years, lies yet another long unused instrument of his wild and senseless hunts - his crossbow, with a loosened bowstring, deep in the ground, next to Gesu Nuovo, lie two skeletons arranged in a straight line, for long free of the suffering of bodily desires and now alike, that of his first nymphomaniac wife and her last love, a nephew of one of the popes,*

somewhere along the route of an escape to the east, a dagger, the murder weapon, becomes covered with rust, and thus everything has found its place and is finally and fittingly laid to rest,

he lies, these are already his last minutes and his eyes become glued to that skull beneath the wooden baldachin, the skull, which I cannot see because, bereft of colour, it has vanished,

he sees the skull and a will-o'-the-wisp, which does not exist because it is inside him –

he lies and suddenly laughs, once again grows silent and listens,

but no longer to his compositions, his voices, a soprano, a falsetto, a tenor and a bass, which he frequently sang since no one else was capable of doing so, but he no longer hears himself and his voice,

he does not hear the already fading breath, whisper, acute delight, sforzato, sudden elevation to an ecstasy that produces numbness, to a place where beauty becomes insufferable, where death and love blend into a single fulfilment and are linked, and where the unexpected becomes an inconceivable event,

he no longer listens to the chords, modulation, harmony and enharmonic of the bold, unrestrained and incorrect transitions from a flat minor to C major, he no longer makes his way anywhere or slides along chromatic steps

o morire –

o mor-i-i-re-

- morire, yes, this is where he is, but he does not listen to death, love, God, or his Crux Benedicta, he does not hear those disembodied voices –

he lies and listens to other things, lies in the anticipation that he will hear something unfamiliar, but does not, he hears nothing, he lies with his head on the very same spot where my head is, listening in the void, looking into the void, he dies immortal, incomprehensible, great, an admirable puzzle, a murderer, inter mortuos liber, here, on this wintertime bed on which I now lie on a cold November night.²³

Yet another poignant, immensely intensive and imposing Apocrypha describing the last moments in the life of Carlo Gesualdo. In this case, the element of fiction has been stressed outright ostentatiously. After all, this literary scene is not based on documents nor does it try to “prove” its historical assignment – it is a pure game of the imagination. And yet it deals with something of importance, something that one would like to describe paradoxically as “real”. In the light of attempts recently undertaken in historiography and consisting of bringing “poetry” and “prose” together, and in view of endeavours at annulling the rigid division into the “fictional” and the “historical”²⁴ this remark could be more than an attractive paradox.

The cited works are involved in a curious dialogue. The texts talk with each other, supplement each other, and cast a light on each other. Objects familiar from Herzog’s film, a powerful and gloomy piece of furniture in the palace of Prince d’Avalos, the site of pleasure and crime, and two ghastly skeletons from the San Severo chapel are motifs that recur, albeit in a different setting, in the Hildesheimer narration. Recall: a moment before death Herling’s protagonist composes his last madrigal, but in Tynset Gesualdo rejects music and earthly sounds while unsuccessfully straining to hear music from the other world.

In the Hildesheimer text Gesualdo – similarly to the mysterious name: Tynset – is portrayed, so to speak, entirely within a puzzle, an unsolvable tangle of ambivalence. His antonymous descriptions multiplied in the story are, after all, symptomatic: the “murderer” mentioned upon several occasions has a strong counterpoint in “the divine Gesualdo”, “immortal”, “great”, “admirable creature”. Herling unintentionally continued the Orpheus motif, but Hildesheimer clearly referred to the Biblical motif of Cain, the first murderer, his incomprehensible deed and even more inexplicable gesture of divine protection already after the crime had been perpetrated. Damned and divine. The divine murderer. This literary portrait – close in this respect to Herling’s story – not only observes contradictions but is based on them, as if suggesting that the “true” Gesualdo either is – must be! – a jumble of those contradictions or does not exist. If we cleanse his biography of all those contrary elements whose arrangement into a cohesive whole poses such a difficult task, then our portrait will change into a caricature operating with a very limited repertoire of means. In the earlier cited article Lotman accentuated that a good biography is capable of disclosing the necessity of assorted, mutually tied lines of life. In an ideal portrait those lines permeate each other. *One shines through the other, inspiration through the mounds of life circumstances, light through smoke. A portrait in the sfumato style.*²⁵ The literary vision of Gesualdo from the Hildesheimer novel – a portrait of the prince of Venosa drawn with barely several lines – appears to be an ideal realisation of those recommendations.

In a similar spirit Hugo von Hofmannsthal in his brief but penetrating sketch about Oscar Wilde, possibly the best ever written on the topic, described the ambivalent nature of a biographical portrait. Hofmannsthal traced the mystery of the writer’s double by evading all schemes aiming at unambiguity. At the same time, he firmly stressed that Wilde’s “true” image does not emerge from accentuating only a single side of the biography. On the contrary, the at least partial solution of the mystery of identity consists of understanding that the truth of life is embedded in mutual permeation, convolutions, the imposition of assorted and sometimes totally contrary and, it would seem, mutually excluding motifs, and that, threatened with distortion, it has to be the truth of the entity of experience:

We must not make life more banal than it is, nor turn our eyes away so as not to behold this band when for once it can be seen on a brow.

We must not degrade life by tearing character and fate asunder and separating his misfortune from his fortune. We must not pigeonhole everything. Everything is everywhere. There are tragic elements in superficial things and trivial in the tragic. There is something suffocatingly sinister in

what we call pleasure. There is something lyrical about the dress of a whore and something commonplace about the emotions of a lyric poet. Everything dwells simultaneously in man. He is full of poisons that rage against one another. There are certain islands where inhabitants pierce the bodies of their dead relatives with poisoned arrows, to make sure they they are dead. This is an ingenious way of expressing metaphorically a profound thought and of paying homage to the profundity of Nature without much ado. For in the truth the slowly killing poisons and the elixir of gently smouldering bliss all lie side by side in our living body. No one thing can be excluded, none considered too insignificant to become a very great power. Seen from the viewpoint of life, there is not one thing extraneous to the Whole. Everything is everywhere. Everything partakes of the dance of life.

In the words of Jalal-ud-din-Rumi, "He who knows the power of the dance of life fears not death. For he knows that love kills."²⁶

The most profound sense of all attempts at building the image of a character from the past, work on creating his portrait, is well described by the Polish word: *wywoływanie* (invoking) together with its interesting semantic, both when the issue at stake is the commonplace *wywoływanie po imieniu* (calling by name) or the more complicated *wywoływanie fotografii* (developing a photograph), but also when one considers the suspicious practice of *wywoływania duchów* (calling up ghosts). After all, each of those phraseological collocations, although in a different manner, mentions the process of distinguishing someone from the anonymous mass, a gesture that differentiates but also, more extensively, brings to life. What else is a portrait if not an attempt at capturing – painting, taking photographs, filming – someone's uniqueness, at recording in an image or a word the single, inimitable stigmata of personality, that differentiating sign, that property described by Duns Scouts as *haecceitas*, a quality distinguishing each of us from the common human denominator.

The portrait constructions recalled here are three attempts at materialising the spirit. Their "veracity" and "adequacy" are not the question of some sort of a comparison to so-called historical truth because in this instance - so to speak - the evidence is missing. Their ultimate sense is thus supplemented by the spectator/reader. Actually, we are the matter of those works. Now all rests on us. Those portraits can only nurture our imagination. The portrait of Carlo Gesualdo depends only on us. After all, each one of us decides which of the presented hypotheses - the crime macabresque, the tragic melodrama or the empathic soliloquy – appears to be more convincing. It is we who ultimately decide whether the prince of Venosa is to be remembered or forgotten²⁷, and whether in

our eyes he deserves to be eternally damned or will be redeemed.

Nothing can be precisely analysed, named and understood. Experience is indifferent to argumentation. Regardless into which narration we place our trust the existence of a "dark spot" in biographical cognition remains a fact. To believe that even the most all-sided biography leaves no mysteries is, according to Hermione Lee, the excellent biographer of Virginia Woolf, to become the victim of the most seductive and false myth of the biography.²⁸

To be continued

In one of his most recent interviews Bernardo Bertolucci admitted to the journalist that for some time he had been cherishing a dream: he would like to abandon modern themes, which absorbed his attention in the latest productions, and focus on the past. The lead character would be an historical figure; the director would like a time machine to transfer him to the sixteenth century. *I am fascinated by Gesualdo da Venosa, a Neapolitan composer, author of madrigals and sacral music. Igor Stravinsky called him the precursor of twentieth-century music. De Venosa married one of the most beautiful women of his time, but he was much too fond of music and Maria was much too fond of sex. She had a lover and Gesualdo's family urged him to kill her. I would like to tell the story of this man in love with a woman, music and the very notion of love.*²⁹

A successive film about the prince of Venosa, another biographical construction, a successive facial composite, and yet another anthropological study told in the language of film. Regardless how we would assess upon the basis of such a laconic announcement the value of this project (one may deliberate whether the drama of Gesualdo can be reduced to two simple formulas: *he was much too fond of music and she was much too fond of sex*) one thing is certain: the story of the prince, musician and murderer unexpectedly goes on. More: it seems to have become increasingly intensive. The prince still possesses a strange force of attraction. As we can see, a successive chapter of this story is ahead of us.

This is truly amazing – so many years after his death Carlo Gesualdo is doing quite well.

He lives on.

Endnotes

¹ C. Cavafy, *Glosy*, in : C. Cavafy, *Wiersze zebrane*, transl. and prep. Z. Kubiak, Warszawa 1992, p. 8.

² Among more important writings see: C. Gray, P. Heseltine, *Carlo Gesualdo. Prince of Venosa. Musician and Murderer*, London 1926; G. Watkins, *Gesualdo: The Man and His Music*, introduction: I. Stravinsky, Oxford 1973; A. Vaccaro, *Carlo Gesualdo, principe di Venosa: l'uomo e I tempi*, no place of publication 1998.

- ³ Awarded two important prizes: *Prix Italia* (1996) and *Best Television Film Award* (1997).
- ⁴ On various meanings of the term "rhetoric" and in particular its film applications cf. M. Przyłipiak, *Film dokumentalny jako gatunek retoryczny*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" no. 23:1998, pp. 5-20.
- ⁵ To this motif we should add the reflections of Cecil Gray, who upon the basis of suggestions made by Thomas de Quincey in his celebrated essay: *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (Polish translation in: T. De Quincey, *Wyznania angielskiego opiumisty*, transl. M. Bielewicz, Warszawa 2002, pp. 330-418) outlined a meticulous parallel between Gesualdo's precise and painstakingly conceived music and the just as carefully planned murder of Maria d'Avalos, cf. C. Gary, P. Heseltine, *Carlo Gesualdo. Prince of Venosa. Musician and Murderer*, London 1926, pp. 63-74 (the chapter: *Carlo Gesualdo considered as a murderer* is by Gray, while comments by Heseltine, mentioned by Place, concern the prince's music). Interestingly, this trace appears also in the recently composed musical entitled *Gesualdo* (authors: B. Fernandina, S. Breese), in which Gesualdo is described as the "dark prince" or "prince of darkness". A description of the spectacle and fragments of the music are available on: *Official Website for Gesualdo – A New Musical.htm*. The rather curious and bombastic score does not evoke Gesualdo's sophisticated compositions but confirms his astonishing presence in pop culture.
- ⁶ Suffice to recall the emblematic scene ending the film. The fence around Xanadu Castle features a sign with the inscription: *No trespassing*, which apart from the literal meaning possesses also a metaphorical one and is, for all practical purposes, a categorical declaration: no entry into someone's innermost core!
- ⁷ V. Nabokov, *Prawdziwe życie Sebastiana Knighta*, transl. M. Kłobukowski, Warszawa 1992, pp. 45-46.
- ⁸ G. Herling-Grudziński, *Madrygal żalobny*, in: *Don Ildebrando i inne opowiadania*, Warszawa 2000, p. 112.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-117.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.
- ¹¹ This wavering indicated by a question mark is not accidental. In many of his stories Herling intentionally confused tracks and imposed upon the biography of the protagonist/narrator his own life story. Such an approach was aptly noticed by Ewa Bieńkowska: *I always had the impression that Herling's stories are more personal than the records in his Dziennik. This is intimacy transposed into fictional narration, but translucent and obvious in the most important tangles of history. (...) In the stories the writer attaches increasing prominence to the fact that he is experiencing the deceit of a double portrait, the night-time listening to Gesualdo ...*, E. Bieńkowska, *Pisarz i los. O twórczości Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 130-131.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ¹⁴ The acclaimed Italian musicologist Massimo Mila, author of, i.a. *Breve storia della musica*, the source of the fragment about Gesualdo's music cited in the story.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.
- ¹⁶ Attention was drawn to this feature of the construction of Herling's numerous stories by A. Morawiec in: *Poetyka opowiadań Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego*, Kraków 2000, pp. 122-123.
- ¹⁷ G. Herling-Grudziński, W. Bolecki, *Rozmowy w Neapolu*, Warszawa 2000, p. 182.
- ¹⁸ Y. Lotman, *Biografiya – zhivoye listso*, "Noviy Mir" no. 2:1985, quoted after a note signed by H. C. and entitled: *Jurij Lotman o biografistyce*, "Literatura na świecie" no. 11:1985, p. 352.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 352; another biographistic trap mentioned by Lotman, who described it as the sin of a "cheap belles lettres approach", is realised in an almost model-like way by *Madrygal. Powieść o Gesualdzie da Venosa*, a story by the Hungarian author Laszlo Passuth (Warszawa 1981). This copious (almost 600 pages!), horribly boring story about the prince's life, built almost entirely out of conventional elements and brimming with hundreds of less or more necessary details from the epoch, proves the aptness of Lotman's successive comment: *If the expressiveness of the historical background is greater than that with which the main protagonist of the biography was depicted then the narration compels the reader to conclude that the object of the biography is interesting solely as the son of his age, a representative of something: an epoch, a milieu, an estate*, op. cit., p. 350.
- ²⁰ W. Hildesheimer, *Tynset*, transl. A. Roslan, S. Lichański, Warszawa 1973, p. 159; in the medley of characters populating Hildesheimer's novel we come across Cain (a brief theological dissertation deals with his crime) and the Ghost of Hamlet's father, but also "real" German war criminals from the *Endlösung* era. An interpretation of *Tynset* maintains that this is one of the most shocking literary records of the Holocaust and in particular the memory trauma associated with it, cf. M. Cosgrove, *Traumatic Memory in Wolfgang Hildesheimer's Tynset*, a paper presented at the Conference of University Teachers of German in Great Britain and Ireland, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 8-10 Sept. 2003; summary available on the Internet page of the conference.
- ²¹ Hildesheimer, op. cit., p. 141.
- ²² Following the example of Giorgio Colli I comprehend the concept of the puzzle in the Early Greek manner: an a-logical being, a dialectical tangle of contradictions, a reality enrooted in an inconceivable divine sphere, cf. G. Colli, *Narodziny filozofii*, transl. S. Kasprzysiak, Kraków 1991, pp. 52-60.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-143.
- ²⁴ See the particularly instructive reflections by Hayden White, *Poetyka pisarstwa historycznego*, transl. various authors, Kraków 2000, p. 105.
- ²⁵ Lotman, op. cit., p. 353.
- ²⁶ H. von Hofmannstahl, *Sebastian Melmoth*, transl. P. Hertz, "Zeszyty Literackie" no. 53:1996, p. 65.
- ²⁷ From the viewpoint of the purely musicological dimension of Gesualdo's works nothing seems to indicate that they are to be forgotten. See: numerous papers read at the *La musica del Principe. Studi e prospettive per Carlo Gesualdo* conference held in Venosa on 17-2003 and the Music Conservatory of Potenza.
- ²⁸ H. Lee, *Biomitografowie, czyli życiorysy Virginii Woolf*, transl. J. Mikos, "Literatura na świecie" no. 7-8:1999, p. 349.
- ²⁹ *Kino sprzeciwia się czasowi. Z Bernardo Bertoluccim rozmawia B. Hollender*, "Rzeczpospolita" no. 26:2004 ("Plus Minus" supplement, 31 April).

The Androgyne Who Fell to Earth

In 1998, more than a quarter of century after the brief rise and fall of glam rock, Todd Haynes made a film-homage about glam pop-culture and its icon, entitled: *Velvet Goldmine* (in Poland it was shown under the not very apt title: *Idol*).¹ Haynes' film was not, however, an ordinary "biography" of a given epoch or sub-culture – it was, as I have mentioned, an homage but also an attempt at an analysis of a phenomenon, a discovery of all its constitutive elements and, finally, a colourful synthesis that was not supposed to describe glam rock but to become one of its products.

Glam was attractive and extravagant, and thus appeared to be superficial. Until recently, it was regarded as merely a brief, kitschy and trivial moment in the history of popular music, and efforts to introduce it into a wider social or cultural context were rare. True, glam works of the most important artists of this trend – David Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Brian Eno or Brian Ferry – were examined with appreciation (although also sometimes with a pinch of salt), but deeper reflection on the phenomenon as such did not, for all practical purposes, exist. Only recent years brought publications whose authors decided to treat the phenomenon in question as just as essential for studies on subculture (and thus pop-culture) groups as a sociological analysis of mods, hippies or punks. The extraordinary diversity of the meanings of this trend, its complexity, inter-textual qualities and, predominantly, subversive potential were noticed. The revolutionary character of glam rock revealed itself in an immensely bold (much more so, as it became apparent, than in the case of the hippie ideology) approach to manners and morals, sexuality and identity in general. It proposed experiments with sexual and gender identity by going on the assumption that identity is something that we can create ourselves and that it is a fluid and open category succumbing to manipulation. In this fashion it tried to blur the boundaries and differences between the feminine and the masculine, the hetero- and the homosexual; glam negated social norms up to then extremely closely guarded and inviolable (even by such supposedly revolutionary ideas of freedom as those proclaimed by hippies). Glam started to be treated as a text, an extremely self-aware construct, each of whose elements was part of a well-devised strategy. An exaggerated and over-stylised aesthetic of glam, considered up to then to be an empty form with no ambition to express anything but itself and a product cynically intended for consumer-oriented young people, proved to be a code and content by no means trivial but full of melancholic irony combining enormous, brilliant subversity, unlimited eroticism free of all norms and a longing for the unattainable. Such contents were found in the superficial and the formal, in artificiality, exaggeration, and theatrical qualities so characteristic for glam. Those categories comprised a message liquidating the traditional division into form and content.

Glam

Glam rock (in America also known also as glitter rock) emerged in Great Britain during the early 1970s. Naturally, it had its precursors and phenomena that from the point of view of ideology, customs and, in particular, aesthetics strongly inspired it. In the UK they included undoubtedly the mods subculture and in the USA - the milieu of Andy Warhol's Factory. From the mods (whose name is an abbreviation of "modernist") glam borrowed a certain approach towards style and aesthetics envisaged as a supreme value decisive for identity and individuality. From the habitués of the "Factory" and pop-art it took the obliteration of boundaries between art and pop-culture, a demonstrative game played with one's creation and image, and, predominantly, sexual freedom expressed in that which was glam's *raison d'être*, i.e. *gender-bending* and the negation of the binary nature of boundaries.

The discovery of the concrete moment in which glam emerged as fully mature remains controversial; the same holds true for resolving the question: who was its "original" and "true" initiator? For some critics and fans this was the appearance of the T. Rex band in the once highly trendy and extremely influential British TV music programme: "Top of the Pops" on which Marc Bolan, the band's frontman, appeared in full make-up and with eyelids dripping with glitter. For others, the alpha and omega of glam and its unquestioned king is its most popular star - David Bowie. In this case, the borderline moment could be either Bowie's album: *The Man Who Sold the World* (mainly due to the controversial cover on which the longhaired singer lounges on a highly decorative sofa posing in one of his famous "man dresses"). The most spectacular occurrence, when glam was first noticed as a fully formed (musical) genre and trend (fashion and pop culture) and which ultimately affected its form, was Ziggy Stardust – a mysterious androgynous arrival from the stars, who came to Earth in order to save it from annihilation. With his irascible although cold allure (of a strangely sexual nature) he captures the planet and hypnotises crowds. Ultimately, however, Ziggy succumbs to the worshipping throng and his narcissism takes over: he abandons his noble mission and fantasizes about falling

in love with his ego. In order to rescue the Earth and himself Ziggy must slay his ego and depart.

The Ziggy character proved to be exceptionally emblematic and ultimately prophetic for glam. First, he was the realisation of a postulate of greatest importance for the entire trend – the creation of a persona, a totally artificial identity that, albeit extremely evocative, would not conceal its invented nature. Ziggy was a construct stemming from fantasy, a combination of futuristic imagination and longing for the past and innocence. He originated from fantasy and thus was not part of the human, earthly order. As a construct he was to be directed to a great extent against complete “naturalness” – the ethos of the culture of the ‘60s, cultivated by hippie artists, who in a programme-like manner were expected to be authentic, genuine, and natural. Through such created constructs as Ziggy glam was supposed to say that “naturalness” is full of hypocrisy and, moreover, that as such it simply cannot exist. Identity and image are always but creations – there is no primal substance. The only choice we have is to allow to be fashioned by social norms and demands (regardless whether belonging to conservative societies or the ostensibly progressive, such as hippies) usurping the right to naturalness, correctness, and truth or to take over control over self-creation. By negating the conceit of naturalness glam opened a path towards unfettered creativity, whose substance was to be one’s body, way of life, and identity. The question about primary nature and “truth” no longer had any sense – that what was essential was incessant creationism, the fluidity of categories and their constant metamorphoses instead of petrification in hermetic and untouchable definitions. Ziggy (and thus Bowie) urged his fans to experiment with their image and identity, to create themselves no longer in an opposition to, or upon the basis of any sort of norms but as part of the latter’s total rejection. The slogan: “Be as you are” must be changed into: “Be as you want to be” (a similar formula: *don’t dream it - be it*, can be found in the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* directed by Jim Sharman in 1974. Although Sharman’s film cannot be directly associated with glam it had numerous common features and from the ideological and aesthetic viewpoint it was maintained very much in its spirit). Such an approach to one’s identity (in particular sexual) became the glam programme and part of its strategy and ideology.

Ziggy was an embodiment of these postulates. By observing the principle of resigning from the binariness of gender, sex, and sexuality Bowie created Ziggy as an ideal bisexual androgyne, not so much a combination of both genders as their negation. He was supposed to exist beyond them without depriving himself of combined sexual potential. In this manner Ziggy became a determinant of the glam style, a fashion he devised and which transcended the conventions of the masculine and the feminine and combined an enormous number of stylistic tracks and references. This *sui generis* hybrid was com-

posed of elements originating from assorted cultural contexts, albeit always oscillating around an ambivalent and never ultimately defined ideal of androgyny. Ziggy was envisaged as a mysterious creature from the stars, a combination of a sexless, remote, and ideal body, demonic, dehumanised, and minimalistic futurism, and nostalgia for the opulent cabaret from the turn of the nineteenth century and the 1920s. The extremely slender Ziggy/Bowie was usually dressed in a shiny latex costume concealing all symptoms of sex and colourful high platform boots. His outfit was supplemented by vivid make-up and startlingly orange hair. Although Ziggy is, as a rule, perceived in categories of bisexuality it would be more apt to use the term “pansexuality”. His purpose was not so much to desire as to be desired regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Bisexuality, even if only due to its name, refers to binariness – and Ziggy transcended and thus eliminated binariness itself and its principle. He was primarily an object of desire whose entire essence flirted with his fans. More, from the very onset to the end Ziggy functioned as a fantasy, a conglomerate of the dreams and desires of his fans – at no moment in his existence did he claim the right to be “genuine”: he was supposed to be an idea and a substance, and to live in a world of fiction and not facts. His presence could never be palpable, nor his identity – recognised, diagnosed, and enclosed in a definition.

With the exception of Bowie none of the glam artists created a character of this sort. The others² – Marc Bolan from T. Rex, Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry from Roxy Music, Iggy Pop of The Stooges, Lou Reed from the Velvet Underground or the New York Dolls – operated rather with their image, always remaining within the domain of gender-bending and referring to the camp stylistic. Marc Bolan resembled a fairy-tale elf straight out of a J.R.R. Tolkien story combined with a drag queen in strong make-up. Brian Eno in his cosmic and gloomy costumes could have successfully appeared in a horror story with elements of science fiction. On the other hand, the style represented by Brian Ferry contained the elegance of gangsters from the 1930s, American kitsch of the 1950s, and the nonchalance of the mods – all with an addition of distinct sexual ambivalence. Lou Reed, however, came from the integral milieu of Andy Warhol’s Factory. Reed, a member of the precursory (in all respects) Velvet Underground was to transfer the Factory into new aesthetics, an embodiment of a dangerous and colourful life unfettered by any sort of norms, and of total openness as regards sex and gender. Reed also represented a climate of drug-induced self-inflicted destruction and decadence, so characteristic for the music of the Velvet Underground and the ambiance of the Factory, and ultimately essential also for glam. An extreme example of such self-destructive creation was Iggy Pop, today described more often as a precursor of punk rock than one of the authors of glam. Pop represented

the animal element, sexuality conceived not as created on the surface of the body but as pure albeit transgressed nature. While Lou Reed was to be a male version of a femme fatale in dark make-up and with black nail polish, Pop on stage became the embodiment of unpredictable and hysterically wild sexuality – he harmed and exposed himself while sprinkling glitter. The theatrical nature of his performances consisted of ostentatious “naturalness” closer, however, to untamed instinct rather than to the “authenticity” which the hippies wished to personify in the 1960s. Although none of these artists (with the exception of Bowie, who has to be viewed as separate from Iggy) decided to publicly announce homo- or bisexuality or to openly overcome heteronormative coercion, they all transcended it in a more creative way – their transgression consisted rather of creating (sexually) undefined images while always leaving room for uncertainty and assumptions. It is ambivalence and not declaration that was to become one of the key principles of glam. Sexuality was to be deprived of all definitions, to be left to its own potential unlimited by all norms or social conventions. In addition, sexuality was outfitted with a costume and made-up so as to mark just how conventional and artificial was its image and enclosure within binding binariness. Since the deconstruction of sexuality is always accompanied by a costume, the latter can be arbitrarily changed or created anew and experiments can be carried out while violating the conventionalised.

Camp

From the viewpoint of its essence and significance glam was a phenomenon strongly enrooted in camp sensitivity – not only regarding aesthetics but also that, which could be called its “policy”. To an extremely large degree the camp aspect of glam corresponds to an attempt at its description (not definition – since the definition of camp is by the very nature of things an impossible feat; its recognition is a question of intuition) presented in Susan Sontag’s famous *Notes on “Camp”* (1964).³ True, the essence of camp would be fondness for the unnatural, a predilection for extravagance based, on the one hand, on excess and, on the other hand, on passion, the ambition of creating something very serious that, however, fails but simultaneously does not lose any of its intensity as well as genuine pleasure and involvement (which often may produce pathos that ceases to annoy and starts to entertain). Camp taste has an inclination for the purely decorative and visual, which accentuates the texture of things and their sensual surface. A camp thing or character wishes to be unusual and that feature is, as a rule, to manifest itself in exaggeration and splendour, in *glamour*. Camp tries to be aristocratic but often this quality turns out to be false and pretended and resembles costume jewellery that although not “genuine” can still make an impression. First and foremost, camp has a predilection for the theatrical and the artificial, aesthetics or rather

over-aesthetisation, in which the distinction between the aesthetically “good” and “bad” is no longer binding. The camp dandy will not shy from vulgarity and is capable of elevating the low to a high rank.

Although this description matches glam perfectly, camp in its glam version often negates the theses proposed by Sontag, who claimed that camp emphasis on style assumes neglect of the content concealed beneath the surface of style. The “ideology” of glam tries to prove that content can be actually the surface itself and that it does not lose any of its value or gravity. It is simply the division into style and content, form and content that is liquidated.

Sontag, however, negated the political nature of camp even though camp as such and its glam “variant” are predominantly subversive and thus political and never remain neutral. Camp provokes, and hence is involved in non-normative culture relegated to the margin and often socially branded (even if this involvement assumes a frivolous and not overly serious form). In this sense, glam matches better those attempts at describing the nature of camp that are proposed by theoreticians trying to expand and modify Sontag’s canonical text and to reconcile all writings that criticise it. David Bergman wrote: *First, everyone agrees that camp is a style (whether of objects or of the way objects are perceived is debated) that favours “exaggeration”, “artifice” and “extremity”. Second, camp exists in tension with popular culture, commercial culture, or consumerist culture. Third, the person who can recognize camp, who sees things as campy, or who can camp is a person outside the cultural mainstream. Fourth, camp is affiliated with homosexual culture, or at least with a self-conscious eroticism that throws into question the naturalisation of desire.*⁴ In turn, according to Jack Babuscio camp is defined and established by four key features: irony, aestheticism, theatricality, and humour.⁵ Irony is supposed to refer to the contrast between a given individual (or object) and his/its context.⁶ In this way, irony combines opposites: male/female, high/low, fictitious/true. For irony to be effective it is necessary to endow it with some sort of a concrete spectacular shape – *the art of camp therefore relies largely upon arrangement, timing and tone*⁷ - hence the overblown aestheticism and even over-aesthetisation. Hence also the enormous pressure on the superficial, the external texture of things. Babuscio remarked that style is the medium for self-projection, the carrier of meaning, and the expression of emotions; it is never “neutral” but is always constructed and exists rather as a form of awareness.⁸ It is also always subversive and accentuates the non-continual by contrasting things that are ostensibly contradictory; in this way it undermines the very principle of constructing such standards - the binding principle of banality. Although camp is often associated with kitsch (and sometimes is even called conscious kitsch), the two phenomena are separated by an essential difference: camp assumes earnest involvement - the ability to strongly identify oneself

with that, which is regarded as camp. On the other hand, kitsch is artistically shallow and vulgar and focuses on sensation; kitsch is sentimental and superficial.⁹ The essence of camp is not its flamboyant aesthetics but rather the code concealed within it and its evocative character (kitsch is not intentionally subversive). Camp does not stop at depiction as such – it constantly stresses that we are dealing with presentation and convention.

Discussions (more or less theoretical) about glam emphasize its visual, aesthetic aspect while ignoring meanings contained in visuality; those satisfied with the description alone did not see any need to analyse the causes of constructing such aesthetics. The point of departure is the name itself – glam (*glamour*) – assuming that the most prominent component was exaggerated and lavish form (usually featuring the artificial opulence of costume jewellery). The essence of the phenomenon, however, appears to be something else. As Brian Eno, one of the representatives of glam, declared: *I have to say that the “Glam” part was the wrong idea to focus on. For me it wasn’t so much about glamour so much as the idea of changing identity or thinking up your own identity. Whether it was glamorous or not was actually accidental.*¹⁰ In other words, form as such, although ostensibly designating only itself, indicated the contents concealed within. In a truly camp paradox the content was not separate from the form but was contained in it.

Now for a moment back to Sontag’s text. By constantly stressing camp’s predilection for artificiality she assumed that the likeness typical for camp is that of the Androgyne. Sontag maintained: (...) *The most refined form of sexual attractiveness (as well as the most refined form of sexual pleasure) consists in going against the grain of one’s sex. What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine (...)*¹¹ and stressed: *Camp is the triumph of the epicene style. (The convertibility of “man” and “woman,” “person” and “thing.”)*¹² In other words, *all style, that is, artifice, is, ultimately, epicene.*¹³ Glam understood this dependence perfectly. Style and artificiality were based on diametrically comprehended creativity independent of what we call “Nature”. In this mode, the identity that each one of us creates for himself should be not only the “reversal” of that “Nature” (to act against one’s sex) but fully independent. Consequently, in glam that, which is genderless is more popular than that, which is bisexual and combines the masculine and the feminine.

Longing and desire

Velvet Goldmine was intended as homage to a past epoch, its music and ideology. It was not supposed to be a monographic study of glam. Haynes wanted to avoid any sort of documentariness. He was more interested in the film being glam in itself, so that its construction and stylistic were governed by the same laws as glam creativity and narrations by glam rockers. *Velvet Goldmine* is thus more

of a dream, a recollection brimming with the nostalgia of someone for whom glam became a borderline moment in defining his identity. This is the reason why the whole story is seen through the eyes of a fan – Arthur, who as a journalist is to resolve ten years later the mystery of the feigned murder of a former glam-rock star, Brian Slade. Arthur, now grown up and disillusioned with reality, is compelled not only to find out about the fate of the object of his youthful fascination but also to go on an inner journey and settle accounts with his rejected wishes and longings. Although Haynes applied a construction strategy familiar from *Citizen Kane* by Orson Welles – a single story seen by numerous witnesses – the narration, deprived of all traits of realism, compels us to think that Arthur’s experience and recollections are of key importance. We watch a combination of recollections, imagination, and dreams, for which facts are but an inspiration and which can be never verified. This is an extremely well conceived operation – the story we watch is only a construction composed of many others, interlinked and overlapping. None can possess a status more authentic or credible than others. The same strategy is present in each symptom of glam rock creativity and appears in queer theories. That, which we recognise as a fact – someone’s history, identity – is a construction, while access to so-called truth is impossible. The essence of things as such does not exist; there is only its depiction. There is no such thing as primal nature – all is the work of culture. This is why in *Velvet Goldmine* nothing claims to be the sole truth and fact. This is not to say, however, that we are dealing with pure fiction – the director tried to treat the two categories as equal, to obliterate the boundary between them, and to render their status identical. Once we name them, facts become fiction and the latter can always become facts for someone who wishes to recognise it as such.

In order to create a complete albeit auteur synthesis of glam rock Haynes followed all the paths that could have led to and from glam, those that could have become his inspiration, and those that he inspired himself. More, the director defined glam rock as the most quotable moment in rock and roll, a *great collage of sources*.¹⁴ This is also why the film is made of scores of short texts, quotations, and references. First and foremost, while tracing the precursors of glam rock it resorts directly to Oscar Wilde, who in *Velvet Goldmine* appears as a magic child dispatched from the stars, the owner of an emerald-amulet. Glam rock was also inspired by the American “glamour” of the 1920s (hence a portrait of Jean Harlow in the office of Slade’s manager), eighteenth-century salons, and the decadent *fin de siècle* cabaret. The intersexual network is woven very finely – the director made use not only of his own trails but also references contained in the works of glam rockers; hence citations from Genet and the inter-war Berlin cabaret. The very core of the narration – the story of Brian Slade and Curt Wild – is

composed of facts taken from the lives of Bowie, Pop, Reed, Eno, Ferry and Bolan. Haynes extracted the most constitutive and essential components and used them to create the history of glam rock embodied in the love story of Slade and Wilde.

All references in *Velvet Goldmine* indicate culture texts dealing with non-normative sexuality as well as the construction of identity by applying the external, the aesthetic, and the visual. Haynes was interested primarily in glam rock's ostentatious artificiality conceived as a medium, style as a means of expression, creation that builds identity, and the overcoming of binariness in the domains of sexuality and gender. In this fashion, the film's prime theme is the glam androgyne envisaged as a subversive person opening up new possibilities, something that remains outside the polarised gender order, and thus an object of desire that fascinates because it comes "not from this world".

This is not, however, the Platonic version of the androgyne belonging to the primeval order of things, a symbol of completeness, purity, pre-sexuality, and universality. The glam androgyne is sexual, or rather outright pansexual. As Stella Bruzzi claimed: *The androgyne (...) has been conceptualised as a pre-sexual Platonic ideal (...). Such flights into intangible, symbolic fantasy capture only half of the power of an image.*¹⁵ The second half was to be composed of irresistible, overwhelming corporeality and sexuality. According to Bruzzi the androgynous figure stands on the borderline between two spheres - the imagined and the real. Eternal unfulfilled longing for the ideal would be, therefore, combined with desire. Longing creates a fantasy whose force is its eroticism.

This is not to say that the aesthetics of the androgyne must be a combination of the features of the feminine and the masculine. It does not necessarily have to be a blend of both sexes and can be their negation or rather that of binary division as such. While not being either a woman or a man, the androgyne can still possess overwhelming erotic force, even if only because by existing outside the boundaries of that, which is known and understood, he personifies mystery, unpredictability and that, which is not subjected to norms and categorisation. In other words, he also carries danger and risk by stirring a wish to cross the reality that we know, with which we can become familiar, and which we can name and experience.

Surprisingly, such an image of the androgyne appears in the visual arts extremely rarely. If authors actually decide to construct a character that is to blur or transcend boundaries between genders they usually restrict themselves to conventionalised phenomena of transvestism, transsexuals or cross-dressing.¹⁶ Meanwhile, none of these categories realises the conception of the androgyne because they all retain the binary division of the sexes even if they link their elements. Stella Bruzzi declared: *Whereas cross-dressing is a collision between genders, which*

*are nevertheless identifiable, androgyny is a fusion that can encompass these shifts and permutations. Despite signalling danger and transgression, the cross-dressed or "dragged-up" body still utilises the differences between the sexes for effect (...).*¹⁷ In this manner, solid banality remains the foundation. *The blurring of differences that characterises the androgyne is, conversely, more dangerous and destabilising because it incorporates eroticism.*¹⁸ This sort of eroticism is based on endless uncertainty and doubts, on a simultaneous recognition, and its lack, of the ambivalence of the androgynous image. The spectator perceives the discontinuity of the identity of such a creature and does not harbour an illusion that he is seeing a woman (or a man dressed as one) or a man (or a woman dressed as one). It is exactly ambivalence that seduces, and by doing so forces us to forget about discontinuity while telling us to fall in love with ambivalence as such. It cannot be classified or categorised since there is no clear-cut definable category beyond femininity and masculinity. The androgyne is neither feminine masculinity nor masculine femininity, nor is he an improvement of one of the genders because he negates the principle of the existence of gender in general. He is something quite distinct – ideal eroticism independent of the division into genders, sexes, and sexuality; more, since androgyny assumes the obliteration of boundaries between the sexes it also presupposes the blurring of the delineated limits of sexuality.¹⁹ This is not to say that it instantly implies bisexuality, because that category, together with the significant prefix: "bi-", is also negated. Homo-, hetero-, or bi-sexuality are replaced by pansexuality, which encompasses all combinations and reaches the very essence of sexuality; it exists outside all categorisation.

Naturally, from the very beginning the most important were longing and desire – the structure of *Velvet Goldmine* and its aesthetics are subjected to these two categories. All tension between the characters and thus also the manner of showing them (always from the perspective of one of them) is tinged with longing and desire. The most important in the construction of the film is the category of memory: narration is based on the mutual permeation of recollections and dreams, while their depiction is deprived of realistic features and over-aestheticized so as to show desire, on the one hand, and to arouse it, on the other hand. By using the same structural principles as those in *Citizen Kane*, Haynes offered several sources of reminiscences – we hear stories successively recounted by persons who had been close to Brian Slade; these stories had been changed into a myth by those who in some way had been betrayed by him. Nonetheless, visualisation is not based merely on their voices - it is the fantasy of Arthur, a fan and a collector of those reminiscences that creates imagery. The stories told by Cecil, Mandy and Curt are filtered through Arthur's suddenly awakened memory, suffused with rejected longing and desire. In this manner, all that we are watching is a trans-

position of reality, fiction founded on the latter. Importantly, this fiction possesses the status of the only truly existing space. Facts are created or rather recreated, and even reconstruction is mere fiction. In *Velvet Goldmine* the supreme principle is construction conceived as negation of the natural, the in-born, the real and that, which exists in it. Here, everything is a product – events, recollections, and even the characters themselves. Among the latter the most sophisticated and best representatives of the ideal of the androgyne are Brian Slade, Curt Wild and Jack Fairy.

First and foremost, all the characters are a conglomerate of concrete features, of “authentic” people – David Bowie, Iggy Pop, Lou Reed, Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry. The parenthesis is particularly important since it indicates the fact that the public identity of those artists, just like their pseudonyms, was a creation, fiction; that they invented artificial persons for the sake of their work and the audience (although only Bowie decided to devise the characters of Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane and Thin White Duke – who were to be clearly distinctly unconnected with him as David Bowie). The successive level of the construction is determined by the performance of the film protagonists – Brian Slade becomes Maxwell Demon (modelled on Bowie-Stardust); Curt – a star brought up by wolves, the embodiment of uncivilised atavism; Jack Fairy, in his gown and jewels, functions as a sophisticated drag queen (rather than as a transvestite) endowed with irresistible but upsetting charm. Each changes into someone else, constructs a persona that, in turn, becomes a manifesto, a programme, a provocation, and, more importantly, a performance. The next level could contain the likenesses of particular characters existing in the memory of other protagonists, very much mythologised and filtered through ever-alive emotions. For Mandy, Brian remains a sweet boy although unyielding and ruthless in his battle for fame, for whom she had sacrificed her youth. For Cecil, he is the embodiment of an ideal and the greatest disappointment (*elegance walking hand in hand with a lie*). Finally, Curt conceived Brian as a quintessence of his fantasy and, at the same time, a supplement of himself. The portrait of Slade in the memory of persons close to him is a construction born of desire, longing, and suffering, since the ideal not only never changed reality but became conquered and trivialised by it. There remains only Arthur and his return to teenage fascinations. Although we hear Mandy, Cecil and Curt telling stories, we see them through the eyes of Arthur who performs the function of the visual narrator. His vision is pure fantasy – based on trivial and already considerably falsified (as a rule, mythologised) knowledge about the idol possessed by each fan. The image of Brian, which he retained, is a mixture of facts obtained from newspapers, posters and photographs, song lyrics, emotions experienced while listening to records, and youthful fantasies that were supposed to supplement the image of the

star. Arthur’s Brian and Curt are fantasies, the products of his imagination, fiction closer to the wishes cherished by him than to reality.

The most important for our reflections appears to be the last category of constructing the person and personality, contained in the fan-idol relationship, as well as the protagonists’ transference into fiction, into the personas that they had created for themselves. Those two types of the construction of identity (or personality) in *Velvet Goldmine* are very strongly connected with the category of an obliteration of boundaries between the genders, a devaluation of the binarity upon which they had been based up to then. The same holds true for desire – sexuality in Haynes’ film ceases to be hetero- or homosexuality just as gender is no longer male or female. Brian-Maxwell, Curt, Jack or Arthur – all realise the ideal of androgyny, although each in his own, personal, and distinct way.

From the very onset, the plot of *Velvet Goldmine* takes place in fairy-tale sets. In 1854 a falling star soaring across the sky above Dublin explodes in lavender sparks. It leaves behind on Earth, in the household of Mr. and Mrs. Wilde, a child – the future Oscar, wrapped in fabric clasped with an emerald pin. The latter proves to be a talisman, an emblem, and a carrier of certain inner force and charisma enjoyed by each successive owner of the jewel. A hundred years later, the seven-year old Jack, beaten and persecuted by his peers, finds in the school playground the emerald wedged between pavement flagstones. He returns home along a path leading across an excessively adorable, over-aestheticized, and ostentatiously artificial and fairy-tale landscape – a symbol of a mythical happy childhood that the boy cannot enjoy. Already as an owner of the gem he stands in front of a mirror and takes a close look at his cut lip, slowly smearing the blood as if it were lipstick; suddenly, he becomes pleased with his reflection. He has created a new version of himself, certain of his value, and aware that his place in the world lies beyond the rigid and brutal norms of the schoolyard, in a land of fantasy *full of strange flowers and subtle perfumes, a land of which it is joy of all joys to dream, a land where all things are perfect and poisonous*.²⁰ This opening sequence combined with an off-screen text tells us that little Jack is the heir not only of the aesthetics of Oscar Wilde but also of the latter’s way of thinking (e.g. in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*). It also shifts the focal point of the film from the conflict between the accepted norm (approved identities) and that, which is situated beyond, the existence of a world devoid of norms. Haynes wished primarily to enter the world (even if artificial) of characters negating norms. By making use of stylistics and a structure resembling a dream he presented reality devoid of polarised identities, values, and categories, leaving his protagonists and reality unidentified and open, and prohibiting their classification.

The grown-up Jack becomes an androgynous creature "guided" by the inherited jewel.²¹ His androgynousness, however, is realised in categories belonging to the discourse of binarity and understandable for the surrounding (which recognises norms). He is treated according to the common understanding of a transvestite – a man, probably homosexual, who dresses as a woman. He does not provoke laughter or becomes a caricature of any of the genders – although this was the way in which the (popular) cinema usually showed all sorts of trans-gender protagonists. Wherever he appears, Jack is admired and respected. To apply a distinction proposed by the theoreticians of camp – Jack Fairy belongs to high camp, to its aristocracy, and all criteria defining low camp are absent. Haynes stressed upon numerous occasions that Jack is the source, the first "genuine" example of his genre, and that his magnetism benefitted all others.

And yet he does not comprise the centre of fascination for all protagonists. It is Brian Slade-Maxwell Demon who arouses the greatest desire. Interestingly, Slade is shown as a usurper who seduces Jack and steals the jewelled pin, thus seizing its power. Nonetheless, Brian's creation, i.e. Maxwell Demon, is someone totally new, "prepared" and moulded by Slade's numerous experiences and inspirations but never merely their commonplace conglomerate. As Cecil recounts, *Brian's tender introduction to the theatrical underworld would leave a dramatic impression*. He thus became acquainted with the revue theatre demi-monde (outstandingly low camp), full of aging transvestites and homosexuals. Inspired by what he saw on stage and backstage, little Brian gave his parents performances during which he became Little Richard – yet another icon inspiring glam rock artists. Then, in the spirit of numerous boys from the suburbs, he joined the mods, *the first true dandies of pop – and known to just about any indiscretion when a good suit was involved*. Their philosophy was to become the philosophy of glam – the most important is creation, pose, and a radically stylised image. Identity and personality can be constructed on the body without succumbing to social pressure. Just as in the case of each subculture, the mods were recruited from among young people whose basic principle of existence was rebellion. This time, they revolted against the greyness and boredom of the surrounding world, the puritan mentality of the middle class, and the working class ethos. Ostentatious consumerism expressed disdain for everything that is common, and the cult Vespa scooter became a symbol of independence while a well-cut suit was to be an attribute of perfectly designed individuality. Within this context it was obvious that in the working and middle class environment, as a rule rather conservative, mods could function as "effeminate" (in contrast to the rockers in their leather jacket and with heavy motor-bikes). Haynes undoubtedly made use of this stereotype – his Brian-mod exploits his pedantic image of a dandy, i.a. to seduce other boys with a girlish appearance.

Brian endlessly observes and spies upon that, which is decisive for the magnetic force of others. This is the force that he perceives first in Jack and then in Curt, who becomes his one true passion and, at the same time, the embodiment of the ideal lover for Maxwell. His relationships are, as a rule, based on desire – not so much for corporeality as for the image of successive fascinations. Brian wishes to stir the same type of unrest and the same ambivalent and undefined emotions. He wishes to become that, which he desires, and just like Ziggy Stardust he desires his ego. This is not to say that Haynes sees the source of Maxwell's power in pure usurpation, although he distinctly makes it clear that among all the protagonists Brian is the only who betrayed and lost the battle waged against imposed, hostile reality. The charisma of Brian-Maxwell was simply granted to him by those who believed in his image, who waited for him, and for whom he expressed that, which they wanted to see. Although Brian created Maxwell, the latter functioned only in the imagination of his fans as a fantasy devised by them, each time different and matching their most intimate and individual longings. A feedback effect – Brian offers others his image and they fill it with meaning and give it back. Hence – if we accept Arthur's perspective as central in the narration of *Velvet Goldmine* – the strongly mythologised characters and space, the obligatory structure of a dream, the conspicuous over-aesthetisation, and the obliteration of the difference between fiction and fact, dream and reality.

The indubitably overwhelming power of Brian/Maxwell comes from his androgyny. As has been mentioned, it not so much links both genders or becomes a "third" one as negates the existence of any sort of gender. Maxwell is supposed to be an arrival from the stars and thus does not have to be a human being. His "alien" nature, although dehumanised, is, however, suffused with eroticism affecting everyone regardless of gender and declared sexual orientation. His eroticism does not arise from an increased potential, the supposed attribute of a combination of man and woman, but rather from the fact that it remains a secret. Since no one knows who Maxwell is, no one is capable of describing the character of his sexuality. It is the unknown and not enhancement that is decisive for his power. Interestingly, Maxwell's persona, urging his fans to join in constant fun and experimenting with their identity, proposed the rejection not only of the binary nature of gender and unambiguous hetero- and homosexuality but also of the existence of any sort of defined gender or orientation. The construction of identity was to take place outside these categories and to be totally independent of them. Since, however, we are unable to move beyond them and the culture that founds them, such creation is outright impossible. There remains the process of juggling with the attributes of femininity and masculinity, keeping a distance towards them, and comprehending their conventional character. At the same



time, such experiments can produce extremely creative effects – we can imagine only two genders as stable; even if they were to be represented in countless variants they will be always enclosed in two "camps". Each representation that would exist somewhere between them would be only temporary and could not become stabilised because there does not exist a defined category that would render it immobile. This is the reason why each androgynous character shall possess a unique character – he can never become petrified and turn into a matrix, to be later repeated.

Queer and the performative character of identity

Velvet Goldmine is a queer film and its author is one of the foremost creators of a current described by the critics as the New Queer Cinema.²² The recounted story of glam rock, its "biography", was "rendered queer", passed through the filter of queer theories – even superficial acquaintance with them can prove to be very important for deciphering the film. Naturally, it would be difficult to assume that the authors of glam rock during its peak period were conscious of the subversive character of this trend; the director, however, was undoubtedly aware of it when he introduced the phenomenon of glam rock into a widely understood history of queer culture (formulated, necessarily, backward), since he discovered in it twin-like similarity to the queer view of reality, sexuality, and identity – the fluidity of categories, the rejection of hermetic definitions, the overcoming of the binary. Haynes noted upon numerous occasions that the early 1970s (and glam rock above all) constituted the last truly diverse, productive, and

progressive period open to new ideas and the toppling of taboos, especially within the sphere of sexuality. The sexual revolution was not brought about by the 1960s but by the 1970s. The earlier decade assumed free love, but actually it was still limited by obligatory heterosexuality and the binary nature of cultural gender. In this sense, it paradoxically remained conservative. On the other hand, the 1970s, together with glam rock, were, the director claims, a quintessence of truly liberated sexuality. *What was so interesting about the glam era was that it was about bisexuality and breaking down the boundaries between masculinity and femininity with this androgyny thing. It was about breaking down barriers (...).*²³ Hayes perceived in glam not only a lens that gathered all these elements but also an immensely important link in the chain of queer culture.

In common use the term "queer" functions as a concept-umbrella encompassing all those sexual identities and sexualities that remain outside the norm of the binary division of gender and homosexuality. Contemporary theories concerning the domain of queer increasingly frequently tend to include within their range identities whose nature is determined not only by non-normative sexuality or sexual identity but also by social class or race. In a word, the category of sexuality ceases to be the sole category for queer – just as essential is every identity that for one reason or another is excluded, relegated to the margin, discriminated or branded by those guarding the norms. In this manner, the theories of queer focus more on identity in general than on sexuality; finally, the construction and perception of norms (and thus also that,

which is regarded as normal) depend on the way in which we see the creation or construction of identity.

The theories of queer oppose the same logic that offers dichotomies based on what we recognise as concurrent, or not, with norms. They go on the assumption that the foundation of oppression is binary division.²⁴ This is why "queerness" as such is to be based on the instability (or constant destabilisation) of identities regarded as "hard", invariable, and natural. It is to overcome divisions, blur boundaries, oppose their hermetic qualities and ossification, and thus propose fluidity, the flexibility of all categories thanks to which it will become feasible to topple an order built on dichotomies and thus the foundation of eventual oppression. Naturally, reasoning of this sort is enrooted in a constructivist approach presupposing that all identities functioning in social order (sexual, gender, racial or class) are merely a construction produced by that order. Contrary to the essentialist model, its constructionist counterpart negates all conceptions maintaining that identity is in-born and embedded in the psyche of each person from his birth, and that it is "natural". In this manner, it discloses the same order that makes use of the essentialist approach envisaged as a tool of social control serving the retention of binariness, norms, and order itself. Stability denotes immobilisation, and instability – creativity and development. Queer supports the second option.

This manner of perceiving identity leads us in a straight line towards theories represented by Judith Butler, who in a number of her works described the conception of performativeness, which pertains to identity. In: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*²⁵ Butler intended to undermine universal reflections on identity as essence, substance, something inherent that precedes all sorts of discourses, relations or conditions. In this manner, she criticised reasoning characteristic for essentialism, and thus also "the metaphysics of substance" that, she stressed, still exists in philosophical and sociological thought. Butler evoked those conceits by following the example of Nietzsche or rather his commentator, Michel Haar, who claimed: (...) *a number of philosophical ontologies have been trapped within certain illusions of "Being" and "Substance" that are fostered by the belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality of substance and attribute. These constructs, argues Haar, constitute the artificial philosophical means by which simplicity, order, and identity are effectively instituted.*²⁶ This "metaphysics of substance" permeates also thinking about the categories of gender – the body is conceived as a substance, a domain in which gender is inscribed, closely stemming from that body (and its biology). By the very nature of things, the body carries gender, which in turn affects directly connected cultural gender and desire (in the heteronormative order focused in an obligatory manner on the other gender). For Butler one of the most important undertakings intent on un-

dermining such an approach is the division of the enforced gender/sex/sexuality triad; this would mean that a biological woman does not have to be a cultural woman who due to her nature desires men ("cohesive" both biologically and culturally). Shattering this triad would also signify resignation from gender binariness and thus open a path towards all those identities that do not find fulfilment in such binariness.

Our reflections attach greater importance to the consequences of rejecting the "metaphysics of substance" – if the latter collapses then all categories based on it and resulting from its logic will lose their *raison d'être*. Since substance and essence are mere illusions there is no original model on which cultural gender is to base itself nor does there exist any "original" model of man and woman realised in countless copies; the very concept of naturalness loses its sense. We are dealing here with *sui generis* reification – that, which appears to be natural, inborn, primary, and pre-discursive is only an artificial product, the outcome of neutralisation that while suggesting naturalness and pre-discursiveness retains the stability of the genders, their binary division, and the order based upon it. The essentialist model becomes replaced by a constructivist one – the "original" or the "ideal" are only social constructs. The performative character of identity is supposed to consist of a constant repetition of that "original" or "ideal" and its bodily realisation by means of gestures, behaviour, and the creation of outer appearance, with this process of repetition producing an illusion of naturalness, the stability of the object and its identity. There exists, therefore, only the copy, which, in a manner of speaking, creates the "original" that, furthermore, *exists exclusively in the symbolic sphere and is a fantasy copied by subjects exposed to socialisation/culturalisation.*²⁷ Butler wrote: *Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself. In other words, the naturalistic effects of heterosexualised genders are produced through imitative strategies; what they imitate is a fantastic ideal of heterosexual identity one that is produced by the imitation as its effect. In this sense, the "reality" of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the original and the ground of all imitations.*²⁸ She claimed, however, that the "roles" that we assume, those "ideals" constantly imitated and embodied by us, are imposed from above and we have no field for manoeuvre – as a subject, we cannot select our "role". We receive it under coercion and have no impact upon it; nor can we reject it or accept another one since we are incapable of acting outside the "matrix of intelligibility", a set of standards and norms that define the way in which we are to look like and behave and who we are to be so that society could accept us and recognise us as "normal" individuals. Those who transcend this matrix, beings that are not enclosed in definitions or norms of identity "cohesion", are usually delegated to the

margin, branded, excluded or ignored. In this situation, a purposeful realisation of a non-continuum (i. e. to shatter the sex/gender/sexuality triad) by, e.g. applying the drag queen practice, is a strategy of submersion intent on breaking the compulsory identity continuum in order to reveal its artificiality, and thus the artificial character of its stability. *Although we are capable of trusting the femininity of a woman, the anxiety, fear or animosity of many people are caused by the femininity of a man. Such panic is associated quite possibly with the unspoken suspicion that femininity could be accessible also to men. This would denote that it does not originate from some sort of feminine specificity, its biology or essence, regardless of its comprehension, but that the source exists elsewhere – beyond the subject!*²⁹

By referring those conceptions to characters created first by the authors of glam rock (less consciously) and then by Todd Haynes (more consciously) one can notice that the fascination they produce has the same foundation as the above-mentioned fear and anxiety. It is sufficiently reinforced so that the characters not so much undermine the stability and cohesion of the identity triad as totally ignore it. The androgynous creatures of glam do not exceed the matrix of intelligibility but bypass it, just as they ignore all standards pertaining to the neutralised "original" or "ideal". The androgyne of glam is not a drag queen combining the feminine and the masculine in some sort of a phenomenal melange – in that case we would be able to still recognise which of its elements culturally belongs to which gender. The androgyne nonchalantly resigns from the attributes of either gender. Naturally, there remains the strategy of subversion because glam and its androgyne constantly mark their artificiality and demonstratively admit that they are only a copy of a non-existent original. This copy, however, makes no claims to being a substance, an essence that is the beginning of everything. Glam seems to be saying after Butler: there is no gender identity apart from its expression; identity is performatively constituted by "expressions" alone, which are perceived as its effect.

In daily life, Butler stressed, we imperceptibly try to neutralise this theatricalisation (this is the source of its success), but glam and Haynes' protagonists consciously emphasize theatricalisation; in this way they simultaneously celebrate it and shatter and deconstruct it. It starts being noticed, which is not to say that it is condemned or rejected. It simply changes its appearance - Bowie, Bolan, Pop, Reed, Eno or Ferry followed by Jack Fairy, Brian Slade, and Curt Wild no longer theatricalise their cultural gender, which is supposed to follow their biological gender and decide about sexuality, but they theatricalise their androgynous identities, their cultural genders that, paradoxically, do not exist since there is no "recipe" for a true androgyne, no stable matrix. In this manner, such activity emphasizes that the idea or primary substance has no *raison d'être* - the androgynous personas of the mentioned artists are only temporary realisations

of some fleeting fantasy that makes no claims to being the source and basis of any sort of identity. True, these are fantasies, but they do not belong to any norm based on the illusion of "firm" identity, substance or compulsory binary sex/gender/sexuality order. Fantasies are to oppose such a system; more, they are supposed to be constantly aware of the fact that they are no more than mere fantasies. *It was the idea of Curt more than anything, this – image. Which, of course, no one could ever possibly live up to,* Mandy says to Arthur at a certain moment. As long as there exists the awareness of "being fiction" there exist preserved creativeness, liveliness, and ensuing subversiveness. Once that awareness vanishes loss becomes inevitable as does joining the binding, heteronormative system. Perhaps herein lies an explanation of the fall of Ziggy and the transformation of Brian and his betrayal.

The latter can possess yet another essential meaning for understanding *Velvet Goldmine* – once again the study by Judith Butler proves helpful by referring to psychoanalytical theories on identification and desire.³⁰ Butler wrote: *Any intense emotional attachment thus divides into either wanting to have someone or wanting to be that someone, but never both at once. It is important to consider that identification and desire can coexist, and that their formulation in terms of mutually exclusive opposition serves a heterosexual matrix.*³¹ In the case of the protagonists of *Velvet Goldmine* this mutual exclusion is overcome. Arthur desires Brian and Curt because, i.a. he wants to be like them. The same process occurs not only in all fan-star relations but also in relations involving the stars, e.g. Brian-Jack, or Brian-Curt. Certainly, great importance is attached here to the violation of the principles of the obligatory order of the sex/gender/sexuality triad; true, almost all the lead characters in these relations are men (Mandy has been bypassed and other subversive women are simply missing, a feature that is actually characteristic for glam as a whole). More, these men not only reject heterosexuality but also the binding "realisation" of biological gender by cultural gender – none of them "represents" a man or plays his role. On the other hand, all build on their bodies an identity that does not belong to the order of any cultural gender. They "are" not men but they also "are" not women (only Jack Fairy could produce certain doubt) – nor "are" they even a combination that could be understandable within the paradigm of the binary order of genders. Their performance is situated totally outside categories.

In such a configuration identification and desire could merge into one, since there is no binariness that would be capable of dividing them. To be like someone else does not denote copying – emulation could be understood only in the categories of a function. Brian does not want to look like Jack nor does he want to copy his creation – he wants to possess the same force as Jack. Since he understands that this force stems from the un-

defined nature of identity and its instability this is on what he focuses the desire of imitation.

The androgyne cannot exist without an image. After all, he does not possess substance and does not exist as a palpable, real being because he is situated outside that, which is imaginable and can be categorised. To exist in the physical reality of daily life means to apply the rules of that reality and thus the categories and norms suggested by culture. The set of those categories is strictly defined and regulated even if it succumbs to constant transformations. The trans-gender character can transgress or negate such categories and norms; he can rebel against them but will be always dependent on their existence. He is embroiled in the definiteness of the “feminine” and the “masculine” and can only juggle them but will never free himself from them. The androgyne, however, possesses such liberty but can exist only as an idea or an image that cannot be examined to the end. The transference of this idea and image onto a screen is a task just as subtle as it is extremely difficult. Ignoring that, which is known, and entering, even if only by means of a visual presentation, the domain of the unknown and even the unrecognisable appears to be an absurd undertaking and one doomed to failure – how could we show something that is actually non-existent? A mere product of fantasy? The cinema, however, can offer us fantasy, and the means of film expression are capable of not so much presenting it as proposing a feeling (or premonition) of its presence. If the androgyne can exist somewhere film can offer him space as long as the latter resembles a dream and never touches the Earth.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Velvet Goldmine* is the title of one of David Bowie's most outrageous songs.
- ² I omit such secondary characters as Gary Glitter and Suzi Quattro and the bands Slade and Sweet.
- ³ S. Sontag, *Notes on „Camp”*, full text accessible from: <http://www.math.utah.edu/~lars/Sontag::Notes%20on%20camp.pdf> (accessed 19.12.2013)
- ⁴ D. Bergman, in: *Camp Grounds. Style and Homosexuality*, ed. D. Bergman, Massachusetts 1993, pp. 4–5.
- ⁵ J. Babuscio, *Camp and the Gay Sensibility*, in: *Camp Grounds...*, op. cit., p. 20.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid., p. 21.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 22.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 23.
- ¹⁰ B. Hoskyns, *Glam! Bowie, Bolan and the Glitter Rock Revolution*, Faber Paperbacks, 1998.
- ¹¹ S. Sontag, op. cit.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ <http://www.theasc.com/magazine/nov98/velvet/index.htm> interview for “American Cinematographer”.
- ¹⁵ S. Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema. Clothing and Identity in the Movies*, London/New York 1997, p. 176.
- ¹⁶ The term: *cross-dressing* means “changing” into a costume culturally ascribed to another gender. This pheno-

menon should not be identified with transvestism, in which it has a rather erotic sub-text; *cross-dressing* is usually a wider concept and exceeds the sphere of personal experience. As a social act it could become an instrument of subversion. On the other hand, it is worth keeping in mind that there is no single binding definition and that existing ones are subjected to constant transformations and, as is usual in such cases, give rise to numerous polemics.

- ¹⁷ Bruzzi, op. cit., p. 176.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. XX.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175.
- ²⁰ Quotation from the film.
- ²¹ Jack is very loosely inspired by Brian Eno and Bryan Ferry, members of the Roxy Music band, regarded as one of the artistically superior within glam rock. From them Jack borrows his surname and a disturbing, innate charisma, often attributed to Eno who rather distinctly realised the merge of two genders while strongly accentuating features belonging to the stereotype of femininity.
- ²² See: K. Kosińska, *Drzwi już otwarte. New Queer Cinema*, www.celuloid.pl, no. 1. 1.10.2003. (http://celuloid.pl/artykuly_cale.html?artykul=71efcd0813a93cd&numer=1).
- ²³ www.avclub.com/articles/todd Haynes 13566.
- ²⁴ See: J. Gamson, *Must Identity Movements*, in: *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. S. Seidman, Cambridge, 1996, p. 396.
- ²⁵ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York-London 1990.
- ²⁶ Ibidem, p. 28.
- ²⁷ D. K. Balejko, *Teatr ról płciowych. Teorie o performatywnym charakterze tożsamości płciowej w oparciu o film Jennie Livingston Paris Is Burning oraz teksty teoretyczne Judith Butler*, in: *Gender w humanistyce*, ed. Małgorzata Radkiewicz, Kraków 2001, p. 136.
- ²⁸ J. Butler, *Imitation and Gender Insubordination*, in: *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, eds. H. Abelove, M. A. Barale, D. M. Halperin, Routledge, New York-London 1993, p. 313.
- ²⁹ D. K. Balejko, op. cit., p. 137.
- ³⁰ Further on Butler mentioned the equally interesting problem of the nature of the existence of identity and its constitution. First, she recalled Freud and his theory of incorporation, which she then compared to the concept of mimetic identification expounded by Mikael Borch-Jacobsen and Ruth Leys; to a certain extent she accepted both. These conceits suggest that the psychic subject, identity, is never primeval or stems from itself, neither is it cohesive and self-identical. It is always constituted by the Others. Finally, Butler combined both theories into a single one. Although they may exert a considerable impact on an interpretation of the relations between the protagonists and comprise a base for further reflections within the context of Haynes' film, due to insufficient space I shall concentrate only on identification and desire. Ibidem, pp. 316-318.
- ³¹ Ibidem, p. 316.

Homo Faber. Accident or Necessity

Chance - *l. cadentia, that which falls out*

1. apparent absence of cause or design; destiny;
2. fortune: often personified
3. a happening; fortuitous event; accident; "That power which erring men call chance" - Milton

Webster's New Twentieth Century
Dictionary of the English Language

*They'd be amazed to hear
that Chance has been toying with them
now for years.*

*Not quite ready yet
to become their Destiny (...)*

Wisława Szymborska,
Miłość od pierwszego wejrzenia,
in: *Koniec i początek*

From the present-day viewpoint, Greek art – the problems that it tackles and the questions that it poses – can be comprehended, generally speaking, in two diametrically different ways. Its examples can be understood either as permanently connected with a certain stage in history and thus perceived as symptoms of the immaturity and "infancy" of European culture, or encompassed in an understanding glance and viewed as an expression of own questions and doubts.

In a discussion with the doctrine of historicism, which assumes a stage structure of the historical process and constant progress in the domain of thought and art, Daniel Bell formulated the following remark: *The historicist answer is a conceit. Antigone is no child, and her keening over the body of her dead brother is not an emotion of the childhood of the race. Nor is the contemporary tale of Nadezhda Mandelstam, searching for the body of her dead husband (the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, who disappeared in Stalin's concentration camps) in order to bury him properly, a case of precocity "on a higher plane".*¹

Take a closer look at the significance of this statement made by the American sociologist. Antigone and Nadezhda Mandelstam. What is the meaning of this

comparison, what is it about? True: we understand something only in a comparison. The one performed by Bell is, however, of a special sort and is certainly not a rhetorical ornament encrusting a discursive argument for the sake of greater effectiveness. The exceptionality of this comparison does not result from the fact that a poignantly real and historically documented experience has been compared to an event and a person whose source was first an archaic myth and subsequently the imagination of an ancient tragedian, while the sole real quality is the literary record or the duration of the theatrical spectacle. It also does not originate from the fact that it brutally confirms the known paradox formulated by Wilde about life imitating art. The issue at stake is much more fundamental, namely, that something of this sort could have taken place and was feasible.

Sophocles staged *Antigone* in about 441 B.C., Osip Mandelstam perished in a Soviet camp 2 400 years later. The timespan separating those two events can be also translated into another, non-chronological measure. In that case, it will involve the enormous mental and cultural distance separating the two epochs between which Bell's comparison built a bridge. At this stage it is unimportant why he acted in that manner but how was it possible. After all, the heart of the matter does not lie in the fact that the compared events are similar (albeit not exactly). Much more essential appears to be the very motion of imagination linking that, which ostensibly cannot be connected.

In order for this bond to possess a more profound meaning and to be something more than a mere formal trick based on external similarity there must exist a conviction about the essential identity of the comparable elements. In other words, there must exist a conviction that the experience contained in Sophocles' tragedy is not solely the reflection of the historical moment when the play was written, and that the sense of the experience does not end in recognising it as a literary monument, but that it is transcended by the ever living, existential topicality contained therein.

Myth, religion, and art are by their very essence impervious to all rationalistic attempts and their logic poses a challenge to categories of Aristotelian or dialectical logic. It is exactly due to them that man delves into the foundations of human condition, invariable in each epoch and culture. This is why we find Sophocles moving even though the social and economic structures from his epoch have vanished two thousand years ago, a fact that amazed even Marx who was, after all, ready to reject any sort of supra-historical values.² This thought expressed by Ernesto Sabato makes it possible to better understand the comments proposed by Bell.

A condition for the comparison carried out by the American expert on culture involves, therefore, such a comprehension of history, which without annulling

variability and negating differences between successive moments in history sees it predominantly as an area of questions and existential situations. *These are existential questions which confront all human beings in the consciousness of history: how one meets death, the nature of loyalty and obligation, the character of tragedy, the meaning of courage, and the redemptiveness of love or communion. The answers will differ, but the questions are always the same.*³ In a thus comprehended history of culture, in history conceived as the space of shared questions, Antigone and Nadezhda Mandelstam share the same plight and hold hands as if above all centuries.

In the cited fragment of Bell's book Greek archaisms maintains an astonishingly close contact with contemporary experience. Contemporaneity seeks its reflection in the symbolic message of the Greek myth and tragedy, and becomes illuminated by it. Apparently, in the perspective revealed by the above-mentioned comparison contemporaneity is not, so to speak, identical. It can contain the not always recognisable stratum of trans-historical meanings. This holds true to an equal degree both for events and biographies that are part of "living" history as well as for events and biographies recorded in art and other cultural "texts".

The cinema frequently embarked on the Greek "theme" and plots of Greek tragedies were filmed with various success.⁴ Probably more interesting than such productions are those films whose reference to Greek symbolic and mythology is never direct but resorts to allusion or is unintentional. In a foreword to a Polish edition of his *Semiotics of Cinema* Yuri Lotman, writing about neo-mythologisation in the cinema and, more extensively, in twentieth-century art, quite unexpectedly commented on the meaning of a film with which the Polish public is familiar to such a degree that it "knows it by heart" and rather does not expect that something more and of interest could be discovered. *Polish readers of the book are probably well acquainted with Roman Polanski's Knife in Water (1962), a film of breakthrough importance for the Polish post-war cinema. I am certain, however, that not all are familiar with Pausanias, the neo-Platonist Porphyry and other sources. Meanwhile, there are profound links between Polanski's film and the rite in question, which in Athens was known as the slaying of the bull and which is the source of the well-known words: buffoon and buffoonery. The myth describes the terrible crime of sacrilege committed by someone who killed the sacrificial bull of Zeus: the bull was struck with an axe and finally finished off with a dagger. When the country started to suffer from famine the Pythia announced that Zeus would forgive the crime if the perpetrator was punished and the bull - eaten. The recreation of the court trial accompanied by a ritual consumption of the bull comprised an annual Athenian ritual. The slayer declared that he would have never committed the crime if*

someone had not handed him an axe; that person in turn pointed to someone who had sharpened the axe and who put the blame on girls-hydrophores who supplied water for the sharpening, while they accused the man who slaughtered the bull with the knife and denounced the latter. Since the knife could not say anything in its defence it was pronounced guilty and drowned.

*The contemporary artist interpreted the buffoonery of drowning the knife as a question of responsibility. A crime had been committed but no one is guilty - hence the perpetrator proves to be the "knife in water".*⁵

Further on, Lotman drew attention to the fact that the film message is *encoded upon numerous occasions* and that depending on the "applied" code the process of deciphering the film will also change. It is essential for the relation between various interpretations not to be that of exclusion. Today, *Knife in Water* can be interpreted as a manners and morals "text", a portrait of a fragment of Polish reality of the 1960s; at the same time, we may disclose its "non-contemporary", supra-historical sense by using the yardstick of the Greek myth and ritual. In the second instance, contemporaneity, ostensibly so familiar and native, starts to emit astonishing meanings. Just as was the case in the cited comparison proposed by Bell so here too film situations and events at essential moments go back to their Greek "models" without losing their contemporary character. Furthermore, importance is attached not only to that, which the film repeats from the Greek myth and rite but also to the way in which it modifies and develops them.⁶

The findings of the American sociologist and the comments of the Russian semiotician are an excellent introduction to the proposed interpretation of Volker Schlöndorff's film *Homo Faber (Voyager)* and its fundamental orientation points. We shall accentuate - as Bell did - the importance of the existential identity of questions appearing in the film with historical "texts", and to indicate - as Lotman did - the way in which a "multi-code" interpretation of a film may contribute to discovering within it unexpected strata of meanings.

Schlöndorff's film is a screen version of *Homo Faber*, the novel by Max Frisch (1957). The scenario was written thanks to the cooperation of both authors. At the time, Frisch was already gravely ill and Schlöndorff was one of the few persons who visited him before death. The writer still managed to see the film at the first special screening in Zurich, to which he invited all his friends. Schlöndorff recalled that the director was pleased but after the film ended he left the still dark interior without talking to anyone or bidding farewell.⁷ I recollect the circumstances accompanying the origin of the film because they constitute an important context, not solely historical but primarily existential. In particularly vital statements Schlöndorff

reconstructed his conversations with Frisch. We shall return to them upon several occasions.

*Frisch told me: "The reason for this book was my trip to South America in 1954. I saw and experienced a lot and wanted to tell about it. Then, suddenly, while writing, there appeared that auburn ponytail on the ship's deck. I thought that some sort of a romance would be a good idea. Several pages later, I noticed that it would end with incest. I must discontinue this motif, I thought, these two books cannot be matched. I shall be incapable of merging jungle and incest, about which no nothing". Naturally, he wrote on and combined the two. I also remember that he said: "When I started writing I thought: let's hope that this book will have a happy end. I don't want to offer the world yet another tragedy". And yet due to its tragic ending the book resembles a dirge of sorts.*⁸

It is difficult resist the impression that the scenario written together with Schlöndorff was Frisch's "funeral dirge", a farewell to the world, and a testament of sorts. Another essential moment came when Schlöndorff decided (for the second time) to try to obtain permission for filming the book. At the end of the 1970s, urged by one of the Paramount producers, Schlöndorff thought about transferring Frisch's prose onto the screen. The whole venture failed due to a motif present in the book, which Frisch too regarded as an obstacle. He regarded incest as taboo and explained to representatives of Paramount that in no case should it be shown on screen.⁹

Several years later the idea of basing a film on Frisch's book returned quite unexpectedly or, to refer to a motif emerging in Faber's story, purely by chance. *Several years ago, when I moved to New York, I had doubts about everything, especially my career, and toyed with the idea that after thirty years of working in the film industry it was high time to learn something serious, to study architecture or medicine. For many reasons things were not turning out right. Suddenly, I recalled the title Homo Faber. (...) I had not read the book from the time offer made by Paramount, but (...) suddenly Homo Faber appeared to be of utmost urgency: this film was the solution to my crisis. I am well aware of the fact that this is a case of abusing literature for the purpose of self-therapy.*

Asked whether the publication of *Homo Faber* was an illumination of sorts Schlöndorff confirmed: *Yes. It took place while I was walking down a New York Street. I returned to my apartment, wrote a letter to Max Frisch, and politely enquired whether the copyright is already available. He answered: "For long no one wanted this bride, now there are two suitors and I'm afraid that she is already spoken for". Half a year later he informed me that the copyright would be available already at the end of 1987 if I were still interested. Soon, I met him for the first time in Zurich. From the very start our contacts were cordial. We sat at a table and I asked him the same question, which you ask me: how did the book come about?*¹⁰ We know the answer.

Schlöndorff's film follows all the most important points of the Frisch novel. There are, however, two noteworthy differences, the first involving the construction of the *dramatis personae*. Faber, the lead protagonist in the book, writes down his account while critically ill and waiting for surgery that, everything seems to indicate, will fail. Frisch proposed that the director should resign from a "somatisation" of this character: *This man should not be sick. A person with such experiences should be well.* The second difference is connected with the plot. The film lacks a whole chapter – *The Second Stage*, describing Faber's story from his departure from Athens to the death of his daughter, the return to an Athenian hospital and the period of anticipating surgery.

What is Schlöndorff's *Homo Faber* about? This is a film about love, or rather loves: Faber's first mournful love for Hannah, unsuccessful and ending with the lovers parting. Then there is the second love, Sabeth's feeling for him, fatal love with the entire horror inherent in that adjective from whose vernacular version the connection with the Latin *fatum* has vanished. The third love – that of a mother for her daughter, remains in the background. What else? It is about a meeting, or rather meetings. About strange, inexplicable meetings evading all logic, which suddenly, from a certain moment, start to create a pattern of a cohesive chain of dependencies. What else? About roaming, or rather wandering that assumes the form of prosaic tours and meandering together, with all metaphorical-symbolic references.

Voyager is thus first and foremost an intriguing tale in which we recognise themes and motifs present in European culture "since time immemorial". Schlöndorff distinctly accentuated the fact that the cinema continues the ancient tradition of supplying tales, although by using new measures: *The force of the American cinema lies in the fact that it tells about people and events. If one were to take a close look at the career of, for instance, Billy Wilder, whom I know well, then one will always notice the stress on the interesting tale and the way in which it is recounted. The cinema is thus a continuation of the traditions of the itinerant storytellers of yore. I mentioned the significance of the plot and the story, but the stories are told over and over again.*¹¹

"The same old stories ...". What sort of story, "ever the same", is told by *Homo Faber*? To put it as succinctly as possible: this film is a recreation of the story of Oedipus, although not literal or primitive. It repeats the story of Oedipus but with certain attempts at re-touching it, inserting omissions, and transposing the ancient plot. Most importantly: by placing Oedipus in contemporary sets the film introduces the fears and problems of its period while preserving the essence of the original tale. It has retained those elements that allow us to recognise in Faber the protagonist of So-

phocles' tragedy. This suggestion will be the prime object of interpretation and analytical "proof", by no means a facile task since, as certain authors stress, the world of the ancient Greeks, Greek tragedy, and its protagonists comprise a reality that we regard as almost totally alien.

In a characteristic of the features of the prime types of Greek heroes (Homeric, tragic, erotic, contemplative), Wystan Hugh Auden discussed the tragic hero by recalling Oedipus and in a rather symptomatic fashion commented on the possible existence of a protagonist personified by him in modern dramaturgy: *We are so habituated to the belief that a man's actions are a mixed product of his own free choices for which he is responsible and circumstances for which he is not that we cannot understand a world in which a situation by itself makes a man guilty. Take the story of Oedipus, for instance. Here a man who hears a prophecy that he is to kill a father and marry his mother, tries to prevent it coming true, but in vain. How would a modern playwright treat this? He would reason that the only way for Oedipus to make certain of escaping what is foretold is for him to never kill anybody and never to marry anybody. He would therefore begin by showing Oedipus leaving Thebes and making these two resolutions. He would then proceed to involve him in two situations, firstly, one in which he is done a mortal injury by a man, secondly one in which he falls passionately in love with a woman who returns his love, situations, that is, of temptation, in which he is torn between doing what he wants and breaking his resolve.*

He yields to both temptations, he kills the man and marries the woman, excusing himself as he does so with a lie of self-deception, that is, instead of saying to himself, "There is a possibility, however slight that they are my father and mother; therefore I must not risk it" he says, "It is quite impossible that they should be my father and mother, therefore I may break my resolve". Unfortunately, of course, the slight possibility turns out to be the actual fact.

In Sophocles nothing like this happens. Oedipus meets an old man on the road, they have a trivial quarrel, and he kills the old man. He comes to Thebes, solves the riddle of the Sphinx, and makes a political match. About these two deeds he feels no guilt nor is he expected to feel guilty. It is only when in fact they turn out to be his father and his mother that he becomes guilty. At no time has been conscious of being tempted to do what he knows he should not do, so that at no time is it possible to say, "That was where he made his fatal mistake".¹²

Keeping in mind the doubts expressed by Auden let us recall at the onset the main points of the film story of Walter Faber.

Found (by chance) by a stewardess at the Caracas airport Faber boards a plane whose start was delayed because of him. On board, he (by chance) makes the acquaintance of Herbert Hencke. As a re-

sult of a (chance) breakdown the plane is forced to land in a Mexican desert where Faber (by chance) finds out that his co-passenger is the brother of his old best friend, Joachim, who married Hannah, Faber's former fiancée. He goes back to New York and from here travels to Paris. His ship is to sail in a week, but Faber (by chance) buys a ticket for a ship departing a few days earlier; on board, he meets (by chance) a young woman and proposes to her, but they both can recognise a joke. In Paris Faber suddenly and without a definite reason (by chance) goes to the Louvre where he once again meets Sabeth. Next, as a result of his unplanned decision (made by chance) they travel in a rented car to the south of Europe. In one of the hotels on the way they spend the night together. In a (chance) conversation with Sabeth, Faber finds out that her mother's name was Landsberg, the same as that of a woman who was once pregnant with him and who was supposed to become his wife. Due to a (chance) fall along the rocky coastline Sabeth dies a few days later. Quite a lot of coincidences. But is this enough to treat the story, here summed up in a rather textbook fashion, as a contemporary variant of the Greek myth and its transposition into the Sophocles tragedy? True, it contains a long list of accidents playing the same important role as in the story of Oedipus. But the film does not have an oracle, whose words incessantly affect the protagonist, there is no Sphinx, Faber does not marry his mother nor does he kill his father, etc. – in other words, there are no motifs of essential meaning for the classical tragedy. Does the motif of an incestuous relationship involving a father and a daughter entitle us to recognise Faber as an embodiment of Oedipus? Even if we were to treat incest as an important, not only structurally, element of the Greek tale it is still an insufficient argument to suggest upon its basis that the two characters are suitable for the parts.

Nevertheless, it seems that contentions in favour of such an interpretation are strong. Before we present them we have to resolve a question of basic importance for our claims: who is Oedipus and what in his myth and the tragedy is "really" important? The answer to this ostensibly simple question is not that easy since contemporary exegetes have exceptionally acknowledged the tragic protagonist. The celebrated conflict of interpretations has, in the case of Oedipus, found an excellent illustration and confirmation. Let us recall in an abbreviated form several "canonical interpretations" connected with his name.¹³

Freud extracted a single element from the entire story and turned Oedipus' relation with his mother into the Oedipus complex. By doing so, he deprived Oedipus of tragic traits and enclosed his symbolic dimension and multiplicity of meanings within an uncomplicated biological aspect of unconscious desires.

Oedipus was forcefully taken from the classical stage to a clinic and laid down on a psychoanalyst's couch. Such an interpretative cure did him little good. Let us keep in mind that it was not Greek tragedy that was built upon the basis of the Oedipus complex, but it was that latter that was created upon the foundation of Greek tragedy.¹⁴

For Lévi-Strauss, in turn, the Oedipus myth (just as any other myth) is predominantly a game of differences within its structure, a logical tool of sorts, revealing irreconcilable contradictions. According to this interpretation Oedipus together with his story and drama becomes transformed into a myth. The protagonist is reduced to playing the part of a "constitutive individual". Nonetheless, symbolic meanings proposed by the Oedipus myth cannot be enclosed into such a purely logical perspective. The symbol precedes and transcends the *logos*. Just as important is the fact that a reconstruction of the myth is not tantamount to an extraction of its meaning, which Lévi-Strauss described as a cognitive function: *What is here called a meaning-function is not at all what the myth means, its philosophical or existential content or intuition, but the arrangement, the disposition of themes, in short, the structure of the myth*¹⁵. So m u c h: the structure of a myth, and so l i t t l e: the structure of a myth.

Vladimir Propp represented a slightly similar approach in an extremely interesting text on the connections between the Oedipus motif and folklore. This is a clear example of the historical orientation of the "late" Propp, seeking in the plots of tales, legends, and epic works a reflection of concrete life situations and historical matter. But he too, just like Lévi-Strauss, regarded "Oedipus" to be a formal unit, one of the "motifs" of folklore plots, a structural counter.¹⁶

Yet another treatment of Oedipus is epitomized by René Girard. It must be said at the very onset that Lévi-Strauss and Propp were interested predominantly in the formal-logical aspect of the Greek tale, while Girard tried to answer the fundamental question: what are the Oedipus myth and legend about? In evocative prose, mixing persuasion with open conceit and gnostic certitude, he argued that only the scapegoat mechanism is capable of explaining the basic meaning of the story of Oedipus. This mechanism is just as effective when we inquire into origin and structure.¹⁷

A community in the throes of a conflict or violence or burdened with misery turns, in Girard's opinion, towards a selected innocent victim who becomes the focus of all amassed negative emotions. Collective violence that causes the suffering or death of that victim restores desired order and recreates the community. The "cause" and "reason" of the misfortune are thus expedited to the outside, beyond the limits of the community.

We have found ourselves within the range of the basic categories of the Girard anthropology: the sac-

rificial crisis, group murder, mimetic desire, and the scapegoat mechanism. This undoubtedly original conception, announced by Girard in: *La Violence et le Sacré* and then developed in several of his other books, unfortunately features a jarring one-sided approach. Almost everything that Girard deals with is elucidated by reference to the same interpretation scheme. By way of example, Oedipus is inserted into an "all-explanatory" hypothesis and, apparently, is supposed to confirm solely the veracity of the previously accepted premises. Girard's extravagant reading of familiar texts is annoying, and the same can be said about the apodictic manner in which he formulated his conclusions and the totalism of his conception, apparently excluding the possibility of all polemics. *Ethnologists are shocked by my blasphemies*, Girard declared bombastically, extremely pleased with himself.¹⁸ Not only shocked: sometimes their approach is extremely critical.

The four above listed interpretations of the story of Oedipus were supposed to constitute a "negative" backdrop for further proposed reflections. We found them unacceptable for several reasons. The first suggests a "bipolarisation" of the classical protagonist. The next two perform his "formalisation", and the last reduces his complexity, forcing him to match an *a priori* accepted scheme. This is why I suggest relegating them to the margin and turning towards philosophical and hermeneutic interpretations of the story of Oedipus. It is here that we shall seek intuitions casting light on the adventures of Walter Faber.

The feature that characterises Faber probably the best is his profession. He is an engineer, a designer, and a constructor of dams. His is a concrete mind, trusting exclusively the senses without succumbing to the illusions of the "divine arts of the imagination". When Hencke compared the landscape around the crushed car to a land of dinosaurs he heard a cold reply claiming that this was a case of erosion and warning against being carried away by imagination. Faber is also amazed by the metaphorical expressions in the statements made by Sabeth. He does not suspect even for a moment that he too, despite his concreteness, is a metaphor. This is a man who places his whole trust in technology and its accomplishments. During one of the discussions conducted on the ship, upset by the remarks made by other passengers about art, origin and eternity, he joins in to add ironically that it is not art and religion that keep the ship afloat but American technology. Faber is a mathematical being and his consciousness is governed by the logic of probability.

The film outlines much more moderately than the novel a likeness of Faber as a technical mind subjected solely to mathematical calculations and the laws of statistics. Frisch's Faber is on the borderline of exaggeration. One of the engineer's characteristic arguments

admits that he does not believe in the verdict of fate or in destiny since as a technician he is accustomed to taking into consideration the formulae of probability. Without the forced landing in Tamaulipas on 2 April everything would have followed a different course: he would have never met young Hencke, perhaps never heard about Hannah, and up this day never realised that he is her father. It is even quite possible that Sabeth would be still alive. Admittedly, this was more than sheer coincidence – it was a whole chain of coincidences. In order to recognise improbability as an existing fact there is no need for mysticism, and mathematics suffices.

To put it mathematically: probability and improbability do not differ as regards their essence but frequency of occurrence, and the occurrence of a phenomenon that is more frequent is much more credible. When, however, something improbable takes place it is by no means a supernatural effect, a miracle or something of the sort, as laymen are fond of claiming. Whenever one speaks about probability, it always contains improbability as the extreme case of possibility, and if that improbability does take place, then there are simply no foundations for astonishment, outrage or mystification.¹⁹

Quite possibly, this exaggeration on the part of Frisch is justified. After all, Faber is not only a surname attached to a concrete person; the word also characterises a certain ideal type, a model figure: *homo* (this time without a capital H) *Faber*. In the case of a model we always deal with a certain overstatement, sometimes close to a caricature. Walter Faber interfering in Nature by resorting to ideas typical for an engineer is its perfect model-like embodiment. Daniel Bell's earlier cited work contains an explanation of the term: *homo faber: Man as homo faber sought to make things, and in making things he dreamt of remaking nature. To be dependent on nature was to bend to its caprices and acknowledge its tyrannies and diminishing returns. To rework nature, to make fabricated things, was to enhance man's powers. The industrial revolution was, at bottom, an effort to substitute a technical order for the natural order, an engineering conception of function and rationality for the haphazard ecological distributions of resources and climates.*²⁰

In order to better understand the meaning of Faber's passion and that of *homo faber* intent on emulating Nature in its act of creation and on subjecting it to "technical tooling" it is necessary to situate it in a perspective different from the usually applied one. It will no longer be a mere chapter in the history of technical achievements but a fact from the history of man understood as *homo religiosus*. This is not a mistake. *Homo faber*, after all, continues, albeit not quite in a straight line, the work of alchemy. The alchemist cooperated in the perfection of matter, accelerated its

natural "work". The very idea of alchemical transmutation embarks upon archaic beliefs about the possibility of altering Nature by work. Ancient metallurgists and mediaeval alchemists envisaged Nature as an emanation of the *sacrum*, but the contemporary *homo faber* acts in a space devoid of signs of hierophany. He also does not conceive "work" involving Nature as tantamount to perfecting it. Despite this difference he unconsciously realises the unfulfilled aspirations of alchemy: the wish to render Nature perfect and to rule over Time. Mircea Eliade declared that it is necessary to seek in dogma characteristic for the nineteenth century (claiming that man's true mission is changing and transforming Nature, that he can produce better and quicker than Nature, and that he is predestined to be its master) that one should seek the authentic continuation of dreams cherished by alchemists. The soteriological myth of protecting and, ultimately, salvaging Nature has survived camouflaged in the bombastic programme of industrial societies, which have chosen the task of a total "transmutation" of Nature and its transformation into "energy".

From the viewpoint of the history of culture one could say that in their desire to replace Time alchemists anticipated the most significant elements of the ideology of the modern world. Chemistry gathered only the crumbs of the alchemical heritage, whose largest part remains elsewhere, in the literary ideologies of Balzac and Victor Hugo, the naturalists, the systems of the capitalistic, liberal or Marxist political economy, materialistic or positivistic theologies of infinite progress, and, finally, wherever faith in the unlimited potential of "homo faber" flares up and the eschatological value of labour, technology, and the scientific exploitation of Nature is seen. Having deliberated over this, we discover that this fervent enthusiasm is based on a single certainty: by subjugating Nature with the assistance of physico-chemical sciences man feels ready to compete with it, but this time without losing Time. From now on, work and science will perform the deed of Time. With the help rendered by that which he regards as most important within himself, modern man undertakes the function of temporary existence, in other words, he replaces time.²¹

Follow this trace. The Latin word: *faber* means artisan, carpenter, blacksmith. Affiliated words - *fabre*, *fabrica*, *fabricatio*, *fabricator*, *fabricor* – sustain the idea of creating, the creative activity contained in *faber* (e.g. *fabricor* – to create, to give life). More: indicating the artificiality of that, which has been produced they contrast this type of creation and natural "creation", thus bringing them closer to the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*. The very word *faber* already resounds with a prediction of divine creation and power.

The film contains a scene whose meaning is wholly emblematic – Faber showing his engineering projects

to representatives of Third World countries. The large screen above him depicts a battle waged by the chaotic element of water and man's ability to tame the elements. The last scene of this instructive film shows an already erected dam and water captured within the walls of the receptacle. Applause. Overwhelming victory. Faber – the divine creator. Faber – the demiurge.

Recall, while continuing for a while the etymological motif, that the meaning of the Greek *demiurgos* is close to the Latin *faber*. *Demiurgos* is an artisan, a potter, and according to the Gnostics – a creator of the material world. In Greek mentality *demiurgos* was closely connected with the idea of knowledge – extraordinary, mysterious, and forbidden.

In a fascinating text about the symbolic of the Oedipus myth (to which we shall return) Sergei Averintsev, discussing the motifs of incest and its connections with the symbolic of power and knowledge, recorded a close affiliation in Greek tradition of the sages and the Magi (and thus those who possessed secret knowledge) and craftsmen. Classical consciousness treated the crafts as a magical art. The master was thus a humble but fully-fledged comrade of the magus. Both had penetrated extraordinary secrets inaccessible to laymen, both are capable of subjugating demon forces (the pseudo-Homeric *potter's song* describes the fantastic demons battled by Greek potters; other craftsmen shared the same plight). Artemidor referred both to the crafts and magic. An interesting parallel can be even conducted for the modern European epoch, which, after all, deprived the handicrafts of a magic nimbus: suffice to recall the meaning of the word “mason” to understand just how strongly the custom of linking crafts with occultistic initiation.²²

The text by Averintsev makes it possible to notice that the etymological sources of technology, a domain closest to Faber, possess magical-sacral roots. Thus Faber – let us gather the heretofore noted motifs – is a person who discovered the mysteries governing Nature, who is “above”, who knows, and cultivates his “magical knowledge” reserved for the few with the dedication of a missionary in lands suffering from “ignorance”; finally, he has assumed a position reserved for the gods. Note, at the same time, how strongly this idea of knowledge is combined within the character of Faber-*faber* with the idea of power comprehended not in political categories but quasi-divine ones; this power over time reveals itself in unhampered designing and forecasting the future.

Faber brings alive the image of Prometheus—the redeemer together with the whole heroic-tragic characteristic contained in that classical symbol. Prometheus, as we recall, was the master of numerous skills and arts (i.a. blacksmithery!) but also, and this is recalled more rarely, a divine potter, as follows from certain ancient

interpretations. Prometheus becomes a sculptor of people. This means that man's configuration of reference is no longer divine order, which could be violated and bring about his defeat. Man is now self-dependent and certain of his knowledge and potential.²³

Schlöndorff's film, to put it explicitly, is not solely and above all a critique of contemporary civilisation and its rationalistic-technological appendages, the spirit of calculation and Promethean optimism. Such an interpretation would reduce the film at least to the level of on-the-spot publicistics, albeit acute and devoid of illusions. This is not enough. The Faber character contains many more meanings. The engineer's deifying technical intellect contains the discernible feature of a tragic hero. This is classical *hybris*. In the afore-mentioned characteristic of Oedipus, Auden wrote outright: *The original sin of the Greek tragic hero is hybris, believing that one is godlike.*²⁴ Now the connection between Faber and Oedipus has become somewhat clearer. Let us, therefore, follow further this trail of barely marked suitability.

The crime committed by Sophocles' Oedipus involved two events: the murder of his father and the incestuous relationship with his mother. Despite the fact that these are two different deeds the crime remains essentially the same. From the point of view of Oedipus the murder of his father is “only” an initial step necessary for marrying his mother. Incest “really” brands the perpetrator. Interestingly, classical authors also shared this attitude: already the tragedy by Sophocles features suitable premises. In the famous IV station the chorus speaks only of: *fatal wedlock, thou didst give me birth* pursued by revenge (v. 1217), without any mention of patricide. In *The Odyssey* Homer too differentiates the premise from the main event: *He married after having killed his father.* In paradoxographic literature, a genre from the domain of popular culture dealing with unusual events, there is simply no allusion to patricide. Here, Oedipus is unambiguously and, it could be said, necessarily linked with incest. The crime committed by him was, therefore, marrying his mother, additionally burdened with murdering his father.²⁵

While analysing the motif of incest within the context of classical culture Averintsev noticed not only a biological phenomenon but also primarily a symbolic dimension. In an extremely precise manner and by resorting to oneirocritique he revealed the symbolic relation between incest and winning and wielding power. The incestuous dream (son and mother) in the symbolic system of Graeco-Roman antiquity was an important prophecy for the ruler and politician. Depending on the manner of seizing power – legally or by means of usurpation – it was, respectively, a fortunate or ominous sign. The motif of incest was also connected, as has been mentioned, with the symbolic

of knowledge. Schlöndorff's film animates this symbolic tangle. There is no doubt that the incestuous (totally unconscious) relationship between Faber and his daughter cannot be treated literally and purely biologically. Schlöndorff: *We agreed that incest could be some sort of a metaphor*²⁶. Paradoxically, this uncertainty on the part of Frisch and Schlöndorff (*could be*) as regards the meaning of the incestuous relationship presented in the film is an advantage from our point of view. It demonstrates that in this case we are within a symbolic space: unclear, non-discursive, allusive, with a barely suggested significance. What sort of a metaphor or symbol is cinematic incest? At the onset, let us once again resort to the subtle arguments expounded by Averintsev.

In antiquity incest was symbolically associated with knowledge, albeit of a special variety - unusual, mysterious, prohibited. Incest was forbidden and terrifying, but divine mysteries too were reserved and inspired horror. Such was the nature of the symbolic tie between incest and knowledge.²⁷ The recorded experience also casts a light on the close connection between incest and knowledge, indicating the affiliation of the sphere of cognition and the domain of Eros. The Biblical use of the verb "to know", denoting penetration of the mystery of the female body, is universally recognised ("And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, ..."). Such an application was adopted also in the Greek. By way of example, in the writings of Menander a girl confesses that her seducer "got to know her", while Plutarch consistently granted the verb in question a purely erotic connotation. Similar instances are encountered in the case of Heraclides of Pont, Callimachus and many other authors. If the Greek language discloses in erotic declarations that "knowledge" signifies the "penetration" of a mystery, then this aspect is without question also *a priori* embedded in Oedipian incest and means the penetration of the most concealed life secret.²⁸

We mentioned previously that Faber is the one who knows, who possesses knowledge. He, who possesses knowledge does not have to seek it. Nor does he expect that some sort of knowledge could enlighten him. What kind of knowledge, therefore, can be achieved by a person who already knows? A true puzzle. Let us return for a while to Oedipus.

Karl Jaspers described Oedipus as a man who wants to know²⁹, in other words, one that does not know. But Oedipus already has at his disposal considerable knowledge. He is sovereign, discerning, solves the puzzle, and defeats the Sphinx³⁰. He has demonstrated certain knowledge and learned something. He knows many essential things, but still wishes to know.

There exists a distinct similarity between the knowledge belonging to Faber and that possessed by Oedipus. This is the type of knowledge based on exag-

gerated trust in the power of the intellect, knowledge that is connected with a conviction about the potential of an exclusively rational study of the mysteries of life. Importantly: this is knowledge-power. Such homonymy expresses the essence of the issue at stake. There is a single difference – in the case of Oedipus such knowledge is connected with power, rule, and political authority, with becoming blinded by power. In the case of Faber, however, this is knowledge of the technical mind, completely convinced about the limitless potential of interfering with Nature, controlling and governing it. Note that in both cases this knowledge refers to the outer world and carries the idea of manipulating and subjugating reality. It is the sort of knowledge that is suffused with a utilitarian-pragmatic aspect.

Time to return to our puzzle. Now it is easier to solve it. Despite the fact that he knows, Faber can still find something out because his incestuous relationship with his daughter possesses knowledge entirely different from the one that so far has been at his disposal. Erotic "penetration" is tantamount to self-penetration, the penetration of one's interior and fate. This is the sort of knowledge whose light brutally brings forth the essence of knowledge already possessed. It reveals the illusions and *hybris* of the other. It shows insignificance or, at any rate, secondariness *vis a vis* the first. The light of *self-knowledge* illuminates *knowledge-power* and not *vice versa*.

There where there is crime (even unintentional) there must exist also punishment. At the same time, this concept of punishment does not have a penalising nature, even more so considering that in the play by Sophocles the protagonist metes out punishment himself. Here, the logic of punishment is ruled by the principle of symmetry or, one is inclined to say using the famous description coined by Blake, *fearful symmetry*. Having learned the truth about himself Oedipus:

*...The pin of gold, broad-beaten like a flame,
He tore from off her breast, and, left and right,
Down on the shuddering orbits of his sight
Dashed it: "Out! Out! Ye never more shall see
Me nor the anguish nor the sins of me.
Ye looked on lives whose like earth never bore,
Ye knew not those my spirit thirsted for:
Therefore be dark for ever."*³¹

The eyes that rested on externalities, the illusions of things, and were unable to perceive the truth of the essential and concealed are gauged out. Symbolically, Oedipus assumes the role of Tiresias and starts to notice that, which the blind seer has known for long. He becomes a "blind seer".³² Now, for the last time, here is the incomparable commentary by Averintsev, who wrote that both the tragic irony in the conversation between the blind, but seeing Oedipus and the blind seer Tiresias, as well as the closing lament of the cho-

rus about the governance of sight compel us to place the act of self-blinding committed by the protagonist within a context of an opposition between the essence and the visual. Oedipus plucked out his eyes, which betrayed him, while blinded by the invisible and beguiled by the obvious. His knowledge turns against him and his sight turns towards his innermost self. Apparently, wisdom-force and wisdom-power are crime and blindness, the dimmest possible darkness of ignorance. Now, immersed in the darkness of physical blindness Oedipus seeks different wisdom – self-cognition; he must see clearly that, which remains inaccessible to his eyes.³³

In *Homo Faber* the motif of the eyes plays an important part almost from the very beginning. Excusing himself Faber tells the stewardess that he was unable to catch the plane on time because he suddenly felt ill because of [his] eyesight. During the evening car ride, somewhere in France, he complains about his eyes, to which Sabeth replies that she will be his eyes. The tragic irony of those words becomes apparent much later. Finally, a scene, one of the earliest in the plot (and maintained in sepia) and, at the same time, chronologically the last (repeated in colour at the end of the film), in which the motif of the eyes becomes cleansed of all physiological-medical associations. Up to that moment, eyes could still dominate the reception of the film. Now, we see Faber in sunglasses, waiting, already after the death of Sabeth, in an airport hall in Athens and confessing that he was incapable of committing suicide. More, he was unable to look because he could not see. In any case, there was nothing to look at since she was no longer.

The dark sunglasses accentuate Faber's blindness – one could add: symbolically, if that word could be freed of the universal meaning that it assumes within this context. Punishment-blindness is not meted out literally. Nonetheless, Faber's blindness is just as real: he admitted that he could not look because he could no longer see. The eyes that up to then looked and did not see, now, just as in the story of Oedipus, are no longer capable of seeing but begin to perceive, albeit at an entirely different level. Sight is supplanted by its inner counterpart, contemplating in humility the incomprehensible verdicts of fate. This is Faber's "journey to the end of the night".

Oedipus the King by Sophocles was known as a tragedy of fate. In *Homo Faber* this motif appears at the very onset and in different versions, while in the finale it reveals itself with full force. In the afore-mentioned "first-last" sequence we see Faber sitting in the Athens airport hall. Off screen, he asks why did all the events have to befall him? But this commentary is heard once the veils of ignorance have already dropped, at a moment "when everything became obvious", when all is *post factum*, or rather: *post mortem*. Earlier in the

chronological order of events in the film, while sitting in an airplane, Faber turns to a stewardess admitting that he fears becoming embroiled in some sort of a chain of developments.. And in a conversation with Sabeth he asks her casually: *Do you believe in chance?* In Faber's mathematical mind there appears an unclear premonition of future events. But it rapidly becomes neutralised by including them into the logic of probability, which leaves no room for doubt.

Faber is incapable of deciphering signs – forecasts of looming misfortune (Joachim, who hanged himself and whom he discovered together with Hencke, a bas-relief with a likeness of a slumbering nymph –Faber remarks that she seems to be asleep, thus anticipating Sabeth's accident). He is incapable of extracting meanings whose reference to him is the profoundest. During the first meeting with Faber on a ship Sabeth shows him a book, which she took on the journey. It is Camus' *The Stranger* with its refrain of a recurring question about the guilt of the main protagonist. Faber, however, shows no interest. This small detail makes it possible to accentuate once again the similarity between Faber and Oedipus. The latter is frequently called a traveller, a foreigner, and a stranger. From the moment when we get to know him, Faber too is on the road. He does not have a home and constantly moves from place to place, living in hotel rooms. He is never at home. Contrary to Odysseus he has nowhere to return to. Faber – the homeless, Faber – the eternal wanderer. The original title of the film: *Voyager*, underlines and showcases this state of Faber's permanent suspension and roaming.

Faber, as we asserted, sees nothing. Not only does he not know what he is doing but he also does not know what he is saying. During a discussion on religion and art he presents an apotheosis of American technology, declaring with deep conviction that he is ignorant about the appearance of the souls of the condemned. Optimism worthy of a protagonist from Sophocles' tragedy.

Faber also does not notice anything peculiar in the sentences uttered by Sabeth during one of their journeys across Greece, when she says that they have so much to see and that it would be a crime not to go to Delphi. Although this statement was made in a rather innocent travelling-tourist context it is difficult to resist the impression that the second sentence is not only a serious information-sign addressed to Faber but also defines the most profound albeit not named outright motif (in the musical understating of the term) recurring throughout the whole story and touching its very core. It would be a crime not to go to Delphi - at the very beginning of his wanderings Oedipus paid a visit to the oracle at Delphi:

... So *privily without their leave I went
To Delphi, and Apollo sent me back*

*Balked of the knowledge that I came to seek.
But other grievous things he prophesied,
Woes, lamentations, mourning, portents dire.*³⁴

Faber had an opportunity to see Delphi at the end of his journeys. He was in a hurry, however, because he wanted to learn the truth as quickly as possible in the belief that it he would discover it in Athens during his meeting with Hannah. Meanwhile, the truth is within his reach. What sort of truth is it? Plato's Charmides says outright: (...) *when a worshipper enters, the first word which he hears is "Be temperate!" This, however, like a prophet he expresses in a sort of riddle, for "Know thyself!" and "Be temperate!" are the same*³⁵. The oracle says: know thyself – the famous: *gnothi seauton*. For Faber "Delphi" is only a locality in his Baedeker tourist guide; it could, however, become a cryptonym, an illusive directive of special knowledge. Just as Oedipus, Faber is a bad hermeneutician.

There exists yet another, equally important, aspect. Remember, after all, that in the Greek world destiny is an actual force. Familiar with the contents of the Delphic oracle Oedipus does everything so that it would not come true. To the scene of tragic recognition he knows nothing about the inappropriate nature of his deeds. Like Faber, guided by some sort of mysterious force (fate? destiny? how should we call it?) he does things that he does not want to do. He aims straight at misfortune, all the time unaware of the meaning of his conduct.

Recall Auden's description of the specific situation in which Oedipus-the tragic hero found himself: *At no time has he been conscious of being tempted to do what he knows he should not do, so that at no time is it possible to say, "That was where he made his fatal mistake"*. At this stage, we could, without misappropriating the characteristic proposed by Auden, describe Faber as the embodiment of a classic tragic hero. After all, Faber is not for a single moment *conscious of being tempted to do what he knows he should not do*.

Schlöndorff: *Why should a man not fall in love with a 25 year-old woman or even marry her. I believe that in the biography of Max Frisch this occurred not once*³⁶. Importantly: Faber did not intend to flirt with Sabeth! In the film this is obvious. There is, therefore, not a trace of temptation. In the Frisch version Faber ponders on his decisions while trying to capture the moment in which he committed the fatal error.³⁷ Are we not mixing conceits by referring specific meanings typical for ancient Greek culture and connected with the idea of destiny to contemporary literary and film reality; is this not a process of projecting Greek notions onto our mental reality?

Tadeusz Czapliński, an outstanding expert on antiquity, responded partly to those doubts in his insightful and passionate article on the "tragedy of

destination". In it, he followed not only the religious and literary sources of *Oedipus Rex* but also discussed modern realisations of the prime theme of Sophocles' great work. Upon the example of plays by Shakespeare (*Macbeth*) and Ibsen (*Ghosts*) Zieliński recorded the changes to which Greek destiny was subjected in modern drama and disclosed its interiorisation. In modern mentality, in contrast to Greek tragedy, destiny ceased being external, a transcendent force acting next to and above the protagonists, and became a psychological moment: a prediction-suggestion, which the protagonist believes (Shakespeare) or immanent destiny, part of history, the past, the protagonist's biography (Ibsen).

The more interesting, therefore, is the conclusion drawn by the brilliant philosopher reflecting on the manner in which the Greek idea of destiny exists in our culture: *After all, even now the fate of Oedipus causes all the sensitive strings of our soul to tremble; naturally, this takes place not because we believe in the existence of transcendent destiny, which occurs in the Sophocles tragedy as the great opponent of the protagonist. No, we regard them only as a symbol – in itself it not real, in contrast to the terrible, unspeakable "something", which it symbolizes. It is exactly this terrifying "something", due to its unextinguished and directly experienced realism that compels us to treat symbolised transcendent destiny as reality. I have in mind, obviously, the contemporary public and not the one from the times of Sophocles or the latter.*³⁸

It is easy to recognize this *terrible, unspeakable "something"* in the sentence passed by fate, which Faber complained about and was unable to comprehend. He added that he was not in love; on the contrary, before the two protagonists began talking Sabeth was even more of a stranger than any other girl, and the fact that he and his daughter struck up a conversation was an entirely improbable coincidence. They could have just as well walked past each other. Why speak about a twist of fate if everything might have followed an entirely different course.³⁹ Really?

That *terrible, unspeakable "something"* appeared in the lives of Faber and Sabeth in a mild version and without any forecasts of unpleasant consequences. Just like in the unusual, ironically light and philosophically "heavy" poem by Wisława Szymborska:

Because they didn't know each other earlier, they suppose that

*nothing was happening between them (...)
They'd be greatly astonished
to learn that for a long time
chance had been playing with them.*

*Not yet wholly ready
to transform into fate for them
it approached them, then backed off,
stood in their way*

and, suppressing a giggle,
jumped to the side.
There were signs, signals:
but what of it if they were illegible (...).⁴⁰

Faber and Sabeth. In a short while *chance playing with them will transform into fate*. First by bringing them together in a hotel room, as in another poem by Szymborska, which just like its predecessor penetrates

*Chance turns a kaleidoscope in her hands.
Billions of collared glass particles flash.
Suddenly Hansel's piece of glass
crashes with Gretel's.
Imagine, in the same hotel. (...).*⁴¹

the mystery of chance to find fulfilment some time later in Sabeth's death. Could it be that chance is just another name for destiny?

Faber endeavoured to discover the meaning of the whole story, sought the reasons for his crime, and reconstructed the chain of causes and dependencies that resulted in the "fatal" ending. If the stewardess had not looked for him, if he had not spoken to Hencke, if he had not boarded the ship earlier, if he had not travelled together with Sabeth ... If, if, if. Tragedy is inscribed into the conditional tense. Why did all this have to happen to me, asks Faber. Why did he have to be the "chosen one"? And is he really guilty?

There are no good, i.e. unambiguous answers to these questions. Indicating *hybris* as the sole source of Faber's crime is not the solution but reduces the complexity of the whole story to a single dimension. Such would have been the answer of a moralist. But just as real as Faber's cognitive pride was that *terrible, unspeakable "something"* regardless how we would be inclined to define this ambiguous "Delphic" expression: as chance, destiny or the very fact of having been born. Faber's crime is not ethical (a description introduced by Czaplinski), because no ethical ban had been violated consciously. This is a *t r a g i c* crime, in whose case all moral and legal categories lose their sense. Guilt of this sort does not match any of the paragraphs of the penal code and a court verdict is not applicable. This is the sort of crime and its references to contemporaneity that were described extremely aptly by Gardener. The celebrated tragic theory of guilt, which in the case of Aristotle did not as yet play any role, does not explain even contemporary tragedy. Tragedy does not take place in those cases where just penance corresponds to the crime and where the moral account of the guilt is complete. Full subjectivisation of crime and fate is also absent in contemporary tragedy. A characteristic feature of the essence of tragedy is rather an excess of tragic consequence. Despite the whole subjectivity of the crime, even modern tragedy includes the moment of that ancient supremacy of

fate, revealed in the disproportion of crime and fate as equal for all.⁴²

Faber, just like Oedipus, is both guilty and not guilty. There where we would like to see an all-examining and resolving alternative we come across an incomprehensible conjunction of contradictions violating the rigours of logic. We face the mystery of individual fate.

Importantly: both in the Schlöndorff film and in *Oedipus Rex* there is no solace. Nor is there any escape from the existing situation. For the protagonist such liberation may be achieved only in and through tragedy. The price of such freedom is tragic clairvoyance, a poignant variant of self-knowledge. Contradictions are not eliminated.

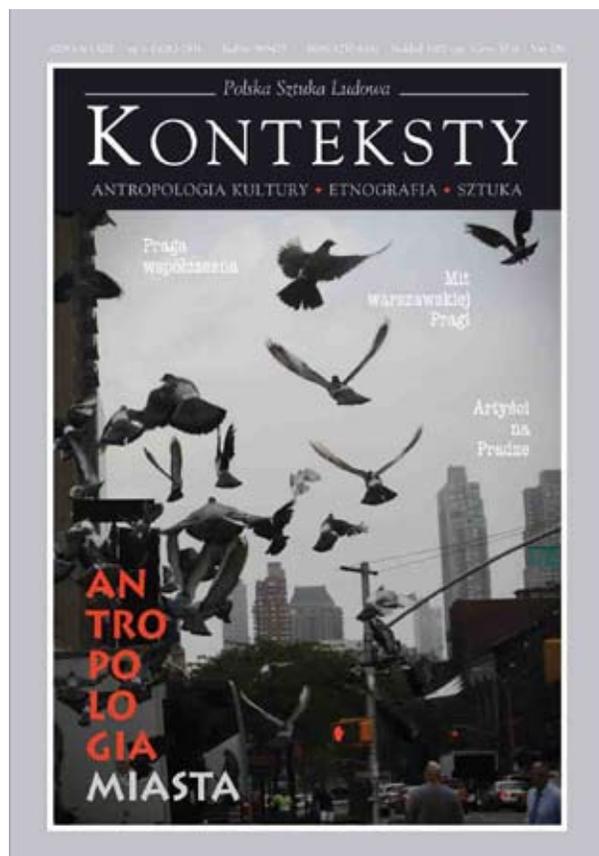
We leave both tragic protagonists: Faber and his wife-to-be Hannah watching fragments of a movie made by Faber during a joint voyage with Sabeth - a laughing, happy and, more significant - living Sabeth. Schlöndorff: *Frisch recalled the experience of watching a film shot with an 8 mm camera, which a friend of his showed every Sunday after the death of his wife. Over and over again, he had to watch how she tirelessly runs across a blossoming meadow from the world of the dead, once again tears her skirt while climbing over a fence and turns her laughing face at the camera. In his opinion this image expressed perfectly the meaning of being dead.*⁴³ We thus abandon Faber-Sisyphus at a moment when he is left only with helpless contemplation of the reality of a shadow, with clairvoyant gazing at non-being.

In a peculiar moment at the end of the story we realise, at first still not very clearly, that it is we, the spectators who just like members of the ancient auditorium are taking part in a tragic spectacle into which we had been drawn by the symbolic-mythical message of the events, not quite aware of the cathartic experiences in the finale. Stranger still is the fact that everything occurred not *via* participating in a theatrical spectacle but at a time when we were looking at the rectangle of the screen. Even Marx, deliberating on the eternal topicality of Greek art, could not have envisaged this.

Endnotes

- ¹ D. Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, London 1979, p. 165.
- ² E. Sabato, *Nieznany da Vinci*, „Odra”, no. 7-8: 1985, pp. 45-46. Werner Jaeger wrote in a similar spirit about Sophocles' protagonists: *The ineffaceable impression which Sophocles makes on us today and his imperishable position in the literature of the world are both due to his character-drawing. If we ask which of the men and women of Greek tragedy have an independent life in the imagination apart from the stage and from the actual plot in which they appear, we must answer, "those created by Sophocles, above all others" (...). The perfection of those characters does not lie in the purely formal sphere but its source is contained in*

- much deeper domains of human nature where aesthetic, moral and religious factors are linked and accentuate each other, W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, Warszawa 1962, vol. 1, p. 288 and 290.
- ³ Bell, op. cit., p. 166.
- ⁴ By way of example: *Orpheus* by J. Cocteau, *Electra* by Cacoyannis and, predominantly, *Oedipus Rex* and *Medea* by Pasolini.
- ⁵ Y. Lotman, *Semiotyka filmu*, Warszawa 1983, pp. 5-6.
- ⁶ Lotman stressed the irony and distance towards the depicted conflict distinctly present in Polanski's film: *The protagonists of the film experience a drama that destroys their whole life but for the author the drama lacks tragic profoundness and significance - viewing it from a distance he sees only the eternal buffoonery of a recurring ritual*, ibidem, p. 7. An excellent example of the mythography interpretation of the film in which equal importance is attached to similarities and differences between the mythical story and the plot is the article by T. Jefferson Kline, *Orfeusz transcendujący: "Ostatnie tango w Paryżu" Bertolucciego*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa - Konteksty", no. 3-4: 1992, pp. 100-107.
- ⁷ Schlöndorff o Maksie Frischu, „Kino“, no. 10:1992, p. 47.
- ⁸ Ibidem, p. 19.
- ⁹ Ibidem.
- ¹⁰ Ibidem.
- ¹¹ Schlöndorff z Babelsbergu, „Kino“; no. 5: 1993, p. 33.
- ¹² W. H. Auden, *Grecy i my*, in: idem, *Ręka farbiarza i inne eseje*, selection M. Sprusiński and J. Zieliński, introd. J. Zieliński, Warszawa 1988, pp. 422-423.
- ¹³ I assume that the above recalled interpretation concepts are part of basic humanities and there is no need no delve into them more extensively.
- ¹⁴ P. Ricoeur, *Egzystencja i hermeneutyka. Rozprawy o metodzie*, selection, prep. and introd. P. Cichowicz, Warszawa 1985, p. 141. Cf. also criticism of a one-sided approach to symbols and images in Freudian psychoanalysis: M. Eliade, *Sacrum - mit - historia*, selection M. Czerwiński, introd. B. Moliński, Warszawa 1970, p. 35.
- ¹⁵ P. Ricoeur, *Model tekstu: działanie znaczące rozważane jako tekst*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, LXXV, 1984, fasc. 2, p. 349.
- ¹⁶ V. Y. Propp, *Edyp w świetle folkloru*, typescript. This is an article issued in the collection: *Folklor i diejstvitel'nost*, Moscow 1976. I owe access to the translation to the kindness of its author, Danuta Ulicka.
- ¹⁷ R. Girard, *Sacrum i przemoc*, Poznań 1993, p. 120.
- ¹⁸ R. Girard, *Kozioł ofiarny*, Łódź 1987, p. 65.
- ¹⁹ M. Frisch, *Homo Faber. Relacja*, Warszawa 1964, pp. 31-32.
- ²⁰ Bell, op. cit., p. 148.
- ²¹ M. Eliade, *Kowale i alchemicy*, Warszawa 1993, p. 176-177; 177-178.
- ²² P. Averintsev, *W poszukiwaniu symboliki mitu o Edypie*, in: idem, *Na skrzyżowaniu tradycji*, Warszawa 1988, pp. 159-160.
- ²³ H. G. Gadamer, *Prometeusz i tragedia kultury*, in: idem, *Rozum, słowo, dzieje*, Warszawa 1979, p. 174.
- ²⁴ Auden, op. cit., p. 423.
- ²⁵ Cf. Averintsev, op. cit., pp. 154-155.
- ²⁶ Schlöndorff o Maksie Frischu, p. 19.
- ²⁷ Averintsev, op. cit., p. 159.
- ²⁸ Ibidem, p. 160.
- ²⁹ K. Jaspers, *O tragiczności*, in: idem, *Filozofia egzystencji*, Warszawa 1990, p. 343.
- ³⁰ Ibidem.
- ³¹ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, v. 1268-1273.
- ³² An expression proposed by Ricoeur, *Egzystencja...*, p. 143.
- ³³ Averintsev, op. cit., pp. 168-169.
- ³⁴ Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, v. 786-789.
- ³⁵ Quoted after: Ricoeur, *Egzystencja ...*, p. 74.
- ³⁶ Schlöndorff o Maksie Frischu, p. 19. Upon this occasion it is worth recalling yet another fragment of Schlöndorff's recollections demonstrating how Frisch regarded *Homo Faber* as a deeply personal work and how "reality" was immersed in "fiction": *Frisch described to me Sabeth on the ship deck in enormous detail: the weather, the way the clouds floated by, and how he never forgot how later, in Southampton, she left the ship and got lost in a crowd. Here, I interrupted him: "Just a moment, they were both sailing to Le Havre". He replied: "Yes, in the book, but in life she got off in Southampton". These are the moments when one no longer deals with a made-up story but comes across something that had been truly experienced* (my emphasis - D. C.), ibidem.
- ³⁷ Frisch, *Homo Faber*, p. 182.
- ³⁸ T. Zieliński, *Król Edyp. Tragedia przeznaczenia*, in: idem, *Szkice antyczne*, Kraków 1971, pp. 464-465.
- ³⁹ M. Frisch, *Homo Faber*, p. 106.
- ⁴⁰ W. Szymborska, *Miłość od pierwszego wejrzenia*, in: *Koniec i początek*, Poznań 1993, pp. 26-27.
- ⁴¹ W. Szymborska, *Seans*, op. cit., p. 24.
- ⁴² F. G. Gadamer, *Prawda i metoda, Zarys hermeneutyki filozoficznej*, Kraków 1993, pp. 145-146.
- ⁴³ Schlöndorff o Maksie Frischu, p. 19.



The Parodic Nature of the Appropriation of Factual Codes and Conventions in Mockumentaries

*Both parody and satire depend on
the sophistication of the viewer,
and on some familiarity with the parodic target.*
Carl Plantinga

In 2001 Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, classifying film scripts according to their relation with the factual discourse generated by a given text, created their own list of mock-documentaries.¹ If we look at some interesting examples of the genre produced outside the English-speaking world such as *Dark Side of the Moon*, *Year of the Devil*, *Czech Dream* and *First on the Moon* through the prism of the classification proposed by the Australian-New Zealand researchers then they can be placed probably more between Degree II (critique) and Degree III (deconstruction) of mockumentaries rather than belonging to Degree I (parody) although in a certain sense they all possess the features of a parody.

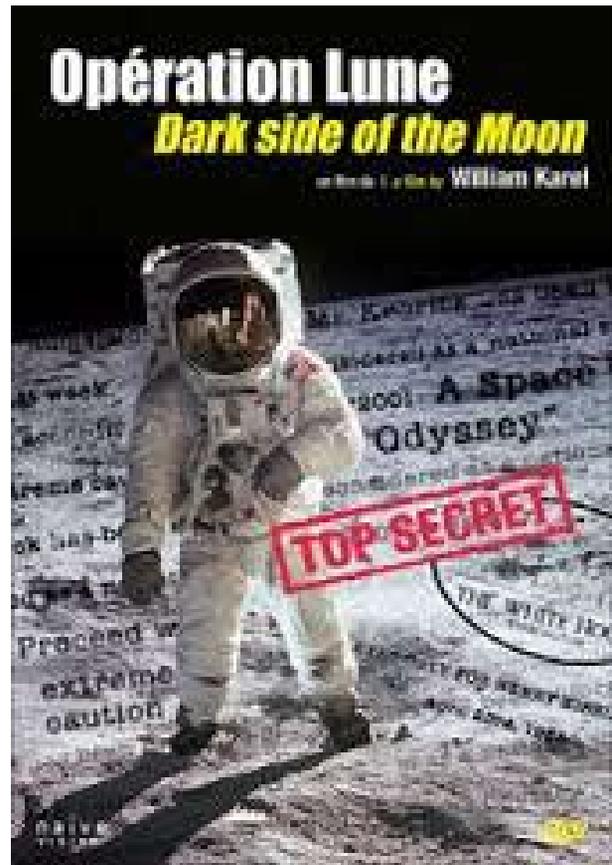
Dark Side of the Moon

William Karel's 2002 French film *Opération Lune*² (aka *Dark Side of the Moon/Kubrick, Nixon und der Mann im Mond*³) is one of the most intriguing and important mock-documentaries capable of deceiving even an experienced viewer; ostensibly it records discovering previously unknown, sensational facts about the historical US landing on the moon in July 1969.

The off-camera commentary defines space flights as a highly spectacular and prestigious and thus important aspect of the Cold War waged by the USA and the USSR. When in 1961 Yuri Gagarin became the first man in history to fly into outer space President John F. Kennedy proclaimed that sending a man to the moon should become one of the main goals of the American nation. This task was assigned to the German scientist Wernher von Braun, a former NSDAP member recruited by the Americans at the end of World War II. Having gained experience working on the production of V1 and V2 rockets von Braun became involved with NASA. In January 1967 the crew

of Apollo 1 died in a fire during a launch pad test. Three months later, cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov, commander of the first multi-man spaceflight, perished while returning to Earth. Yuri Gagarin died in a training plane crash, and in July that year a Soviet rocket exploded when its fuel tanks were being filled. The Americans gained a momentary advantage concealing the fact that space conquest rivalry was actually a cover-up for a more significant if less spectacular issue – the national defence system. The construction of spaceships was a part of a highly expensive missile programme. Supportive public opinion, however, was necessary to convince Congress about the need for high expenditure relating to the defence system. A flight to the moon, a peaceful enterprise, won universal support. Still, it was necessary to show what the immense sums of money had been spent on. Von Braun was the first to realize that an expedition to the moon must be a captivating show, which only Hollywood was able to produce. "Dream factory" professionals were asked to help. Briefly before the Apollo 11 launch entire Hollywood stopped working on other films and 700 technicians travelled to Cape Canaveral. Producer Jack Torrance of Paramount Pictures supervised the whole undertaking. Attention was paid to every single detail but something unpredictable that people should not be allowed to witness could always occur. Technical difficulties could have prevented the transmission of images presenting man's first steps on the moon. The White House was prepared also for this eventuality, and it was decided that an "emergency" studio-set version of the landing would be produced. According to the off-screen commentary President Nixon found it more important to have the astronauts seen walking on the moon than to have them actually doing it. This is why he chose to produce the world's most expensive film of all times: the staged landing of Apollo 11. If the astronauts had landed safely but could not transmit live coverage back to Earth due to unforeseen technical issues the whole extremely expensive undertaking would have been a sheer waste of time from the PR viewpoint. In the case of a failure of the Apollo programme photos were needed to show to the wavering audience. The President ordered Donald Rumsfeld to make Stanley Kubrick a proposal to direct the undertaking. Karel's film suggests that Neil Armstrong's famous moon walk either did not happen at all or, if it did take place, the TV audience of 2 billion watched a staging directed by Stanley Kubrick in the same Borehamwood soundstage (Great Britain) where he shot *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The filmmaker agreed to become involved because he owed a debt of gratitude to the authorities for being permitted to shoot some of the scenes of *Doctor Strangelove* (1964) in actual Pentagon locations. The film presents evidence backing the staged landing the-

sis, e.g. photos of a staked fluttering flag even though there is no wind on the moon, astronauts casting shadows in diverse directions and thus suggesting the application of several sources of lighting, no blast crater visible under the rocket's nozzle, a clearly seen and as if illuminated inscription on the spacecraft saying: "United States" even though the rest of the spaceship is hidden in deep shade, information about extreme temperature changes on the moon, which would cause considerable chemical transformations of the film's emulsion and mechanical damage of the camera itself, information that X-radiation would have blurred the film tape and that ultraviolet rays would have distorted colours perfect in the transmission, that with lunar gravity being different from its Earth counterpart the astronauts' weight would have been insufficient to leave the deep footprints on moon dust that we see in the photographs, that there should have been dust around the landers, that the temperature and radiation changes on the moon are deadly for men while the spacesuits worn by the astronauts could not have protected them, that in all the photographs made on the moon there was no flash, which according to experts should have been visible since the astronauts taking the photographs would have been reflected in the helmets of other crew members, etc. In addition to evidence of this kind presented by former KGB agent Dimitri Muffley (Soviet Intelligence suspected mystification and discovered its shortcomings) the thesis' credibility is boosted by testimony of people familiar with the truth about the staging, such as Kubrick's widow, who seems to confirm the revelations unearthed by the film, her brother (Kubrick's executive producer), Nixon's secretary Eva Kendall, Hollywood producer Jack Torrance, Marla Vargas (sister of the cosmonaut Buzz Aldrin), Rabbi W.A. Koenigsberg, David Bowman of the Houston Space Centre, and Ambrose Chapel, an ex-CIA agent and currently a pastor, who refused to participate in the undertaking but was forced to keep it secret. With each successive piece of evidence and eye-witness comment the film becomes increasingly credible, especially considering that Christiane Kubrick is joined by American political experts and public figures: astronauts Jeffrey Hoffman and David Scott, and NASA supervisor Farouk El-Baz. After some time, however, the more attentive viewer starts to pick up signals questioning or subverting the factual status of *Dark Side of the Moon*. The very moment when this happens – as is usually the case with mockumentaries – depends on the individual viewer. Suspicions certainly appear about 30 minutes into the film – if not earlier – when we hear that Nixon became afraid that the witnesses would talk and wanted to halt the whole operation but it was already too late and the machinery had been set in motion. According to the commentary, an assassination



list appeared on the President's desk. It is also hard to believe in a hunt for members of the film crew producing the moon hoax and their killings, or to treat seriously the suggestion that a heart attack was not necessarily the cause of Kubrick's death. This is highly far-fetched and this is exactly how it is supposed to be because *Dark Side of the Moon* is a mystification, a mock-documentary to be precise, which – as I have already mentioned – if included on the Roscoe and Hight list would be probably classified as belonging to Degree III. William Karel, the director, is a Tunisian-born French filmmaker known as a serious version of Michael Moore, author of political and historical documentaries dealing with sensitive subjects. Karel supposedly likes to recall François Truffaut's words that a documentary is a thousand times more of a lie than fiction, where things are clear from the very beginning. Advertised by official CBS material as a subtle mixture of fact, fiction and hypotheses, *Dark Side of the Moon* applies documentary testimonies, archival film material and extensive interviews, mixing them together perfectly at the editing stage. Consequently, for quite some time the final result convinces us that we are witnessing the unveiling of truth – concealed for many years – about the first moon landing directed by Kubrick in a soundstage. We become less certain about the film's status (or at least we should do so) when we learn the truth about the numerous murders contracted by the US authorities to eliminate witness-

es of the mystification; this truth is spewed by such figures as Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, assistant to Kissinger Lawrence Eagleburger, General Alexander Haig, former Deputy Director of the CIA Vernon Walters, Christine Kubrick and Jan Harlan. But do these persons really convey the revelations? A more thorough analysis of the film indicates that they do not. Concrete – frequently shocking – information is delivered by a voice-over or fictitious characters played by actors. Take this example: off-screen commentary about Kubrick's close relations with NASA is immediately followed by added – as if to confirm – remarks by Christine Kubrick and Jan Harlan, even though they only discuss a special Zeiss lens originally designed for a NASA satellite programme, which – we learn from another source – was lent to Kubrick (presumably in recognition of his *Space Odyssey*) for shooting *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Eve Kendall, Nixon's secretary, recounts that someone from Nixon's circle asked: *What if we film the first steps on the Moon in a studio?* but Kendall is a fictitious character portrayed by Barbara Rogers. Kendall's statement is followed by a cut and Rumsfeld saying: *I talked to the President and Kissinger supported me...* We never find out what exactly Rumsfeld told the President, but we get the impression that he initiated the whole mystification. Another sentence spoken by him is just as enigmatic: *I thought this was the right thing to do because we have to do something to show that we are still the United States of America...* General Vernon Walters says that he warned the President: *It is very dangerous to lie in the United States*, but we cannot tell what lie he had in mind. From astronaut Buzz Aldrin we learn only that: *There were some unusual things that happened*, such as: *President Nixon had prepared some remarks for a speech to give if we could not leave the moon and come back*. The off-camera commentary mentions Aldrin's depression after he returned from the mission. His wife, Lois, says that he became an alcoholic, at loss what to do with himself, and his sister, Marla Vargas (a fictitious character portrayed by Jacquelyn Toman), embellishes the story by recalling how Aldrin used to get drunk every day. Meanwhile, the viewer's imagination provoked by the meticulously edited footage links these comments with the mystification into a cause-and-effect chain. This also happens when astronaut David Scott proclaims: *This was a great film*, presumably talking about *Space Odyssey* while the viewer gets the impression that he meant the moon mystification. When the voice-over informs us that Nixon was overcome by panic leading to his condemnable decision, we see Rumsfeld claiming: *It is not something I wanna do (...) and (...) so I left*, but naturally he does not tell us what precisely he was not involved in. Haig, meanwhile, claims he

told Nixon: *This is going to turn into the biggest scandal that this country has ever seen. Those of us who worked with Nixon know not to take seriously everything he said when he was under stress*. This time not only do we not learn what words it was impossible to treat seriously, but also who uttered them. The situation repeats itself when Kissinger proclaims in front of the camera: *He said some awful things, but they were never done*. A pastor, a former CIA agent, who did not want to participate and was forced to vanish, assume a new identity – that of Ambrose Chapel – and promise he would keep the hoax secret, introduces us to an atmosphere of crime, plots and a conspiracy of silence but turns out to be a fictitious character performed by John Rogers. Paramount Pictures producer Jack Torrance (another fictitious character portrayed by David Winger) describes the production details of *the world's most expensive film*. We find out from David Bowman of the Houston Space Centre (enacted by Tad Brown) that Armstrong's famous sentence about the giant leap for mankind was actually written by someone else and that astronauts used to joke about it; the deadly threat posed by special forces to film crew members is mentioned by Rabbi W.A. Koenigsberg (a fictitious character played by Binem Oreg). As in every mock-documentary the closing credits offer a last chance to recognise the fictitious status of the film, with the disoriented viewers learning that the characters they assumed were authentic are actually portrayed by actors and that it was they, and only they, who made the most sensational, "expository" statements.

Distinct features of mockumentaries include the signals that the director sends from time to time to the audience (before explaining everything in the end credits), suggesting the fabricated character of the film. *Dark Side of the Moon* has its share of them, such as the names of fictitious *personae dramatis*. Eve Kendall is a character in *North by Northwest* (1959), Marla Vargas – in *The Barefoot Countess* (1954), Jack Torrance – in *The Shining* (1980), David Bowman – in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Ambrose Chapel is the name of the spy headquarters in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), Dimitri Muffley combines the names of two presidents from *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), and W.A. Koenigsberg is a play on the name of Woody Allen (W.A), Koenigsberg being Allen's true surname. If these names failed to make audiences suspicious the grotesque story about the hunt for the film crew and their assassinations should certainly do the trick. Mention is due to the rabbi's excellent story recalling how for ten years he hid one of the production designers and taught him Yiddish: *One night he was set on by some hooligans in the Bronx. When they found out he was a Jew, they forced him to do a few alterations to their suits. Then they beat him up and left him for dead. He spent six months in a coma in Mount*

Sinai hospital. And one morning he died. Equally noteworthy is the off-camera information about the film crew escaping to Vietnam and the US government airdropping thousands (!) of armed soldiers and secret agents to catch and eliminate them, along with the hilarious recollections of alleged Vietnamese peasants (subtitled into English) about the agents arriving in their village: *For secret agents they weren't very discreet. They had no respect for anything. We found empty beer cans and McDonald's wrappers everywhere (...) Amateurs, real amateurs. One of them killed himself cleaning his revolver. We kept the body for the kids to play with (...). They were only interested in one thing: girls. It was a real obsession with them (...). They spent their whole time smoking grass. And it wasn't just mineral water they were drinking. They completely destroyed the village's atmosphere. A real disaster. Twenty years later, you can still see their traces (we see an old man drinking vodka straight from a bottle) And all for nothing! They never found anyone. A woman says: (...) They tried to pass themselves off as Vietnamese peasants. Their disguises and accents were perfect. But we identified them in 30 seconds (...) their commanding officer was black!* The end credits reveal that the Vietnamese peasants were probably residents of China and Laos, because the film features fragments of documentaries about the population of those two countries. The hints become stronger as the film draws to a close. The voice-over states that Nixon sent numerous armed forces to hunt down the filmmakers and ... dress up their murders to look like accidents. When Chapel says that several crewmembers died in accidents we see a man lying in a street, with a dozen or so Santas leaning over him, and when we hear that one of the assistant directors drowned in his pool we see two men throwing a dog into a lake. We also learn that a dismembered body of one of the filmmakers was found in Patagonia, with the police claiming it was suicide.

Another evident and thus remarkably funny signal is the fact that the already discussed proof of the moon landing hoax theory (the fluttering flag, the shadows, the absence of dust, the unexpectedly well preserved footprints, etc.), quoted in all publications and documentaries on the topic, features also evidence added by Karel – an image showing a photo of Kubrick shooting *2001: A Space Odyssey* accidentally left on the fake moon surface. Finally – as I have already mentioned – we also find out that Dimitri Muffley, the former KGB agent discussing the evidence, is a fictitious character portrayed by Bernard Kirschhoff. Interestingly, although the film seems to support the thesis that the Apollo 11 landing on the moon was a trick (and many viewers interpreted it in this way), universally known and widely discussed proof is automatically ridiculed and deprecated by the fact that it was presented by a fictitious character. This is why the film can be catego-

rized as a first – and second-degree mock documentary according to the Roscoe and Hight classification. In a concealed manner it supports the myth of man on the moon, introducing only slight anxiety about its connections with reality and simultaneously deriding the codes and conventions of the documentary, challenging its authority, and inspiring concern about such other factual forms as daily news programmes.

Dark Side of the Moon is a masterfully assembled manipulation combining interviews and statements by authentic people taken out of context with stagings featuring actors portraying fictitious characters. The closing credits are followed by final interpretation directives. The so-called bloopers, i.e. mistakes made by cast members and jokes caused by the absurd nature of the dialogue include the twice repeated statement by an alleged KGB agent: *We soon realised the whole thing was a hoax...* along with a declaration by Walters, who is dubbed throughout the entire film: *Listen to me now and believe me because I'm going to tell you the truth...*; earlier, the sentence ended with the words (naturally, spoken by the actor dubbing Walters): *This could mean people's lives*, while the post-credits version has: *I want you to believe me because this is the truth (...)* I never had any relationship with that woman. At the end we also see a relaxed Rumsfeld saying: *You told me this was a high-class programme* and a laughing Helms also stating that he thought this was a serious programme. Does this mean that they agreed to have their statements used in the film and reacted with laughter? Intuition and experience gained in the course of the film tell us that these sentences too were taken out of context and do not concern *Dark Side of the Moon*. This may be confirmed by words unambiguously signalling at the end of the film that this is a parody of documentaries: *Any resemblance to actual living persons is purely coincidental. No goy was mistreated during the filming.* The director verified this in an interview for the Arte TV channel⁴ (although perhaps also in this case we should adopt a cautious attitude). When asked how he came up with the idea of shooting a documentary that does not reflect reality Karel answered: *I have just completed a film about Hollywood that does not correspond to (Hollywood's) reality. Together with an Arte France editor in charge of documentaries we were thinking about making a documenteur, to use Agnes Varda's term (a play on words – documentaire – documentary, and the similarly sounding menteur – lying, as in: fictitious). In this way we intended to contribute something amusing to the otherwise serious Arte programme line-up. This had to be an entertaining, funny film. First and foremost, we assumed that one should not believe everything the media are trying to sell, because it is always possible to persuade witnesses to give false testimony, forge archival materials, and completely distort the message of a documentary by using fake subtitles or dubbing. We wanted to present historical sub-*

ject matter but one that would be universally topical. Since the theme could not be awkward, murder and war were strictly out of the question. This is when we thought about photos of man's first steps on the Moon. This particular issue matched our requirements: the photos' authenticity has been discussed for the last thirty years. Jean-Luc Godard's statement declaring on a TF1 news programme: These live broadcasts are fake, provided an impulse. Sceptics can cite all types of proof: Aldrin became an alcoholic, Nixon was not there when the rocket was launched, and the astronauts travelled thousands of kilometres to spend only three hours on the moon. All very strange, so...

In the same interview Karel also put an end to all speculations about well-known people being aware of their involvement in his prank. Asked how he managed to convince the film's protagonists to participate, he answered: *Not a single one was in on the joke. The idea was to say that the interviews had a completely different purpose. This is why we did not let any of the witnesses into the secret. Only seven actors were involved and actually given lines to learn. They played some of the witnesses. (For example, the character of Nixon's adviser was taken from the film All the President's Men). Due to twisting the testimony of authentic figures we needed only one "false" witness, Nixon's secretary, to make the whole story logical and credible. We told the "real" witnesses that we were making a film about Kubrick, his film, the moon or NASA, and asked them totally vague questions.* Christine Kubrick appeared in the film convinced that it was to tell the story of her husband and in good faith related Kubrick's contacts with NASA, which allowed him to borrow a military lens to shoot *Barry Lyndon*. Farouk El-Baz was convinced that he was going to take part in a film about behind-the-scenes of the U.S.–Soviet space race. Nixon's advisors were filmed in different places and for the purpose of other films, and their statements were taken out of the original context. Karel – as many authors of mockumentaries before him – was charged with attacking the media and questioning our attitude towards photographs. *Without moon landing photos it would be impossible to fully render the event. In addition, the cinema exerts an influence upon news programmes. Many authentic historical events were captured on camera already after they actually took place: raising the American flag atop Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima, capturing the Reichstag, Americans landing in Somalia (shot two or three times). And during the Gulf and Afghanistan wars we did not see... a single authentic photo. I considered showing the role played by a photo, or its lack, in constructing an event to be an intriguing undertaking... But my film should not give the impression of being malicious... Nowhere did we actually say that Armstrong had not walked on the moon. The film only set forth a hypothesis claiming that the USA prepared itself for an eventuality that man's first steps on the Moon could not be photographed. When does the viewer begin to*

doubt? When do we let him know that he is dealing with a joke? This is not really clear. Hence we included a parodical collection of stylistic giveaways at the film's end in case anyone still believed it.

The director also formulated a summary: *Manoeuvring carefully between lies and truth, the film combines facts with total fabrication. We used all possible ingredients: "captured" archival film material, fake documents, and authentic interviews taken out of their original context or transformed by narration or dubbing, and staged interviews featuring actors, whose answers adhered to the screenplay...*

In keeping with the spirit of the mock-documentary theory a certain group of viewers took the film seriously even though it indicates its fictitious character on numerous occasions in an evident and amusing way and, as follows from the interview, despite the director's concern not to leave any doubts about its status. This reaction is demonstrated by comments on several Internet forums, both Polish and foreign, with some disoriented viewers asking for help in finding further information about the film, and others confessing how they were fooled by the joke when they saw the film for the first time and describing how pleasant it was to watch it more carefully for the second time. The Polish website of the Planete TV channel⁵ became the arena of a rather amusing discussion that simultaneously says quite a lot about the reception of mockumentaries. One viewer expressed his outrage caused by an article by Tadeusz Sobolewski, which he found shocking; in the last sentence the journalist aptly defined the mock-documentary message of the film (without, however, using the genre's name): *In the earlier Operation Luna, supposedly made for fun, he achieved a paradoxical effect. He had not only aroused distrust towards American propaganda but also towards films revealing behind-the-scenes goings-on of major politics, which put the chaos of reality into order by using one obsessive key.*⁶ And here is how the viewer reacted: *If the discussed documentary really is an intentional hoax then William Karel deliberately offended viewers all over the world, jeopardized the TV channels that decided to show the film, and intentionally endangered the independent foreign policy of the French state. I expect the Board of TV Planete in France to condemn this unprecedented media hoax and to apologise to Polish TV viewers for moral losses. I appeal to members of this forum – see this scandalous film for yourself...* The forum's administrator, who correctly interpreted the film's intentions but failed to completely decipher all its elements, especially the signals sent by the director, replied as follows: *The director did not intend to conduct an investigation about the moon landing but to prove that TV is a remarkably powerful medium. Contemporary technology makes it possible to manipulate other people's words and images in almost any way you want. Karel deliberately does not reveal which*

fragments of the film were falsified by means of editing and which were not. In this way the viewer can experience for himself how difficult it is to distinguish the effects of a good editor's work from an original recording. There would not be so much confusion surrounding *Operacja Książyc*⁷ if its author had decided to include a few words of explanation at its end. On the other hand, perhaps the director did not plan to reveal the truth so that those who have already seen this "mock-documentary" would not give away to first-timers which fragments of the film are real. Please note that TVP1 scheduled Karel's film for 1 April, April Fool's Day. The *Planete* premiere of the film was also held on 1 April. The viewer replied: Thank you (...) for the explanation, which I find satisfactory although I have to note that the Nazi regime already long ago proved the power of media's impingement, and an attempt at confirming this fact by using such a concocted film is pathetic. I would also like to add another aspect of the issue, which I find important, that is, the concern about the Polish viewer. The Polish viewer is more demanding and critical and reacts to the media in a more serious and engagée manner... As far as I know, films and dialogues fabricated in this way are used in Poland by radio and TV stations to produce amusing entertainment and not documentary films (...). I propose to call William Karel and other producers of his ilk media terrorists. The administrator's response is just as amusing: We agree with your opinion. Viewers in various countries should not be treated in the same way. This is precisely why *Planete* networks were divided in 2004. Ever since then the channel broadcast in Poland is prepared by a Polish staff. We showed *Dark Side of the Moon* when the schedule was still set up for several European countries (including Poland) in France. After the forum's participants discussed at length assorted political matters, the same outraged viewer returned to the film: It was my intention to protest against showing cinematic jokes as documentaries. The fact that during the narrator's account of US soldiers assassinating four secret agents, who worked with Kubrick on the moon landing production, information that: "assistant director Jim Gow was drowned in his swimming pool" is followed by a scene of a dog being thrown into a large lake shows the way in which the director makes fun of the viewer. The problem is that watching this brief scene you get the impression that a man is being tossed into water. Not one of my friends who also watched the film saw a dog. Myself included. Only when examining this scene frame after frame (!)/my emphasis -B.K.-K/⁸) you can clearly perceive the outline of a dog.

Why am I writing all this? I am concerned with the fact that films of this kind not only offend the viewer and are detrimental to the whole category of documentaries, but also ridicule the foreign policy of France as obsessively anti-American. In this situation, even the best documentary criticising Big Brother overseas can arouse distrust. Another viewer reacted as follows: After more or less

ten minutes it became obvious that we are dealing with a joke, irony and satire. The objective? First, the pretentiousness of politicians, the foolishness of the media, the pursuit of sensational conspiracy theories, and the lack of ordinary common sense and a critical assessment of what the mass media are selling us. The film was great fun... The outraged viewer did not give up and quoted his teenage nephew: "The film cannot be classified into any category. If you insist, it can be treated as political satire or farce featuring qualities of therapeutic treatment aimed at people afflicted with a severe case of the Big Brother syndrome. Good mood after viewing the film testifies to its considerable therapeutic assets". And what about the dog? Here's the rub. He [the nephew] could not understand why a dog was given the part of a man. According to him, a dog playing the role of a man is already grotesque and spoils the film's harmony. One more comment on the same forum: When watching a science fiction film, on 1 April to boot, you should keep your distance. Moreover, as far as I remember the film did not claim that the moon landing never happened; it mentioned that the recording equipment did a bad job and that it was necessary to shoot the film in a studio during the "London session", which I do not find so improbable. This is the way in which the Polish Television website advertised the film: *Previously unknown, sensational facts about the historical U.S. landing on the moon in July 1969. Eminent American political experts: Henry Kissinger, Donald Rumsfeld, Lawrence Eagleburger, General Alexander Haig and Richard Helms reveal the truth concealed for many years ...* and quoted (without explanations and a critical commentary) the earlier cited fragment of the film's screenplay about the Cold War circumstances of developing the moon hoax.⁹ A description of the film prepared by an organiser of one of the festivals showing it promoted it as: *Shocking French documentary revealing the most concealed secrets of the American space programme. It turns out that the scenes of Apollo 11 landing on the moon, which we all know from, i.a. film newsreels, were staged in a studio and directed by none other than Stanley Kubrick himself (!). Statements by Henry Kissinger, Donald Rumsfeld and astronaut Buzz Aldrin add credibility to Karel's revelation.*¹⁰ These quotes are rather evocative because within the context of an earlier analysis of the film they tell us about problems with the reception and interpretation of a mockumentary and are among the first records of a Polish audience (ordinary viewers and people somehow connected with the film industry) confronting this cinematic form. Foreign forums, even though audiences in, e.g. the US and the UK are considerably more familiar with the discussed genre, also featured comments full of approval for the more humane face of Henry Kissinger, the relaxed stance of Buzz Aldrin, Alexander Haig and Kubrick's widow, and admiration that a man as busy as Rumsfeld found time to participate in such a film, along with the question: what inspired

Rumsfeld to appear, and even assumptions that White House personalities became involved in the joke to distract attention from a hoax of a much higher calibre. The latter suggestion was actually mentioned on the website of the Grimme Preise award, which the film received in 2003.

Dark Side of the Moon was clearly inspired by *Capricorn One*, Peter Hyams' 1978 Mars landing hoax film. With the flight date approaching NASA specialists realise that the spaceship's life-support system does not guarantee success and prefer staging the landing to cancelling the mission. Just before the ship's launch its crew becomes removed from Capricorn One and taken to a desert military base, where they are informed that they will have to stage the Mars footage. The astronauts initially refuse, but the authorities threaten their families if they do not cooperate. While the empty ship continues its flight to Mars the astronauts spend several months filming the "Mars landing". The conspiracy involves only a few NASA members, until technicians notice that the television transmission signal was sent from a near-by destination and spread the news to journalists. The technicians mysteriously disappear and the journalists find themselves in trouble. When the crew's return is expected, the real (empty) spacecraft is destroyed by fire during re-entry, officially plunging the whole world into deep mourning for the three heroes. The astronauts are killed since they are no longer needed and know too much. *Conspiracy Theory: Did We Land on the Moon?* – John Moffet's 2001 American documentary may have been the second source of inspiration for Karel. *Dark Side of the Moon* essentially appears to be a spin-off of the Moffet production. Both films are constructed in a highly similar way – they use interviews and archival footage and propose the same arguments and evidence of the staged Moon landing of Apollo 11; in Karel's film they are presented by a fictitious former KGB agent, but Moffet's picture features authentic characters – photography and sound experts, scientists and Bill Kaysing, the "king of conspiracy theories" specialising in tracking down evidence supporting the moon hoax theory. Both films expand the motif of staging man's first steps on the moon, but Karel focuses on Kubrick, the alleged director of this enterprise, and on the landing's studio-set staging, while Moffet is only interested in evidence of the hoax itself, which the film claims took place in a secret military base in the Nevada desert. Although Moffet allowed himself to make a joke by bringing in Mitch Pileggi, the *X-Files* star, as his narrator, he decisively defined his film's status by opening it with the following caption: *The following program deals with a controversial subject. The theories expressed are not the only possible interpretation. Viewers are invited to make a judgment based on all available information.*

Year of the Devil and Czech Dream

While in certain countries (e.g. the USA, the United Kingdom, New Zealand) the mockumentary is already a well-known and appreciated sub-genre, in many other ones it is taking its first steps albeit with films that can be classified as superior examples of this cinematic form. Among them is the excellent Czech *Rok dabra* (*Year of the Devil*, 2002) directed by Petr Zelenka. In the tradition of a majority of mockumentaries its classification proved a tough task for the reviewers. Some attempted to describe it as *docufiction where, as the plot advances and absurd events start to accumulate, the viewer loses grasp of what is real and what is fiction... it makes genre classification difficult, freely referring to various cinematic styles, from the documentary and the music movie to the comedy. Its strength certainly lies in the creation of the presented world;*¹¹ this depiction reveals the film's mock-documentary character. *Year of the Devil* initially produces the impression of a music documentary or, more precisely, a documentary biography of the Czech singer, composer and poet Jaromir Nohavica, featuring elements typical for motion pictures of this kind, such as footage from rehearsals and fragments of concerts. It applies absurd statements and weird occurrences to point out that its status is not entirely factual and we should not treat seriously everything we learn about Nohavica; the fact that he took part in the film and mocked his own ups and downs tells us more about him than the film's plot and the information it contains. Besides Nohavica, the film's list of authentic characters includes his friend, guitar player and composer Karel Plihal, the folk band Czechomor and Jaz Coleman, the English rock musician. The Dutch documentary maker Jan Holman (played by Czech filmmaker and distributor Jan Prent), however, is a fictitious character. The film tells the story of Holman, a recovering alcoholic, arriving in the Czech Republic to shoot a documentary about a detox hospital. This is where he meets Nohavica and his guardian angel Plihal and abandons his original plan by setting out on tour with the musicians. Zelenka, mixing a fictitious character with authentic ones, resorted to a solution similar to Karel's *Dark Side of the Moon*, the difference being that while Karel assembled various filmed quotes featuring well-known people and took them out of context, in Zelenka's film authentic characters actually agreed to join the proceedings. The film maintained the Nohavica myth, endowing it with an ambiguous character and simultaneously slightly mocking biographical documentaries of this sort. Some critics correctly classified the film by putting it upon the same level as the quintessential mockumentary *This Is Spinal Tap*, but at the same time calling it a fake documentary¹².



Cesky sen (Czech Dream)

Cesky sen (Czech Dream) from 2004 is an extraordinary film within the mock-documentary context. Before developing their *first Czech reality-show film* or *first Czech documentary hypercomedy*, Vit Klusak and Filip Remunda created a mock-situation of sorts, a far-flung hoax intended to ridicule the post-communist country's consumerism, expose the mechanisms of advertising and susceptibility to the latest kind of propaganda and manipulation, showcase the power of the media and, simultaneously, reveal possible (and applied) documentary practices. Klusak and Remunda, at the time students at the Prague film school, hired ad specialists (many unaware what they became involved in) to arrange a two-week promotional campaign of *Cesky Sen*, a fictional hypermarket. They created a logo, TV and radio advertisements, 200 000 leaflets promoting products of the *Cesky Sen* brand, posters, ads in newspapers and magazines, 400 illuminated billboards, a jingle and a website. On the day of the "grand opening", however, the estimated 4 000 potential clients, who came to a meadow in the Letnany district saw only a colourful hypermarket façade painted on canvas. The idea was inspired by a happening devised by Peter Lorenc who in 1996 handed out several thousand posters advertising a non-existing GIGADIGA hypermarket. The opening was held on an empty meadow, where Lorenc placed a banner with the inscription: *It's better to go on a woodland walk*. At first glance, *Czech Dream* is an account of the successive stages of preparing a major provocation, all the way to the grand "non-opening" of the hypermarket,

while simultaneously bringing the audience closer to the event's social background and the views and mood (also political) of the Czechs, proposing a sociological observation, and presenting "behind-the-scenes" of a major advertising campaign. But there is more... An experienced mockumentary audience derives pleasure from participating in a game consisting of searching for and interpreting signals made by the directors to confirm the film's fictitious status. In *Czech Dream* the game is – so to speak – dual. The majority of descriptions, reviews and comments consider it to be a documentary account of a major hoax and only the expression: *hard-to-classify documentary* reveals that their authors, overwhelmed by the scope of the "mock-situation" itself, have doubts and are uncertain about the film's status. Viewers acquainted with the directors' intention will enjoy spotting signals addressed during the advertising campaign to potential clients, which at the very least should have stirred up certain misgivings (the hypermarket's name, its logo with a comic strip balloon, anti-advertising slogans: *Don't go there, Don't hurry, Don't spend money, Don't queue up, Don't shove* and the remarkably low prices, i.a. a digital camera for less than 1 \$). Members of the audience perceive them as signals not only because the film's directors reveal the technical details of the entire undertaking, of which potential clients were unaware (the directors' new image, the simultaneous casting for a documentary of families regularly spending their free time in hypermarkets), but predominantly because the audience is from the very outset informed that eve-

rything was undertaken with the film in mind, and views the whole enterprise through this prism, which subconsciously influences the reception of the hoax and the attitude towards its victims (*how could they have fallen for it!*). The film entertains its viewers, who feel compassion for, but also superiority to the future victims of the joke, and harbour the impression that they play in the same team as the directors. I believe that the film also includes certain mock-documentary qualities encouraging reflection on the capabilities of the documentarians and the viewers' susceptibility to possible documentary manipulations, caused if not by belief in the factual accuracy of a documentary then by instinctive trust in it. Signals informing about the film's actual state are not overly exposed and the hoaxes and prevarications are not explicit. We are dealing rather with the directors' manipulations or perhaps merely interventions consisting of selective footage in the manner of Michael Moore's documentary method, which in this particular case boils down to manipulation. In any case, such moments may seem suspicious to the more careful viewers, e.g. the fact that a film ridiculing consumerism and exposing advertising mechanisms also becomes involved in ad barter relations. Two minutes of the end credits are dedicated to showcasing logos of companies backing the production. The whole sequence about a shopping trip of the Kudrnov family, winners of the casting for the alleged documentary: *Hypermarket with a Human Face*, is unquestionably an advertisement of the Tesco chain. During the directors' transformation into managers, set in a Hugo Boss salon where they hire suits, a salesman turns to the camera and says that the time has come to fulfil the mutually beneficial agreement and show the Hugo Boss logo for ten seconds; he then rearranges a lapel, the camera zooms on the logo and the filmmakers count the remaining time. In a scene of shooting the advertisement involving a man changing his clothes, an employee of the ad agency organising the campaign points to the Mark/BBDO logo on his cap and the camera zooms in. When posing for ad photos in an atelier, Remunda and Klusak are clearly mocking the whole situation by making exaggerated moves, faking a relaxed and cool mood, and smiling in a studied, artificial way. This sequence is for a moment interrupted by a series of photos of well-known people with equally premeditated expressions and smiles, i.a. Vaclav Havel with wife Dagmar, Karel Gott, Helena Vondračková, and Vaclav Klaus. In this way, the film directors are compared to people who play act in front of the camera, strike a pose and pretend to be someone else, and not to expository documentary makers or journalists, usually on the other side of the camera. The excessively long scene of the conflict between the directors and the ad agency people also looks suspiciously artificial, as if it were to present a

single sentence uttered by an ad agent, thus creating the impression of the directors winking knowingly at the audience (sending a signal). One of the filmmakers wants the posters to include a sentence claiming that on opening day no one shall leave empty-handed. An agent objects, adding that he refuses to lie. After a heated discussion the agent finally declares: *Perhaps for you filmmakers cheating people is business as usual, but in the ad industry we don't lie. You may find this surprising but we don't.* One of the directors then asks him to repeat this statement. The agent looks straight into the camera and says: *I repeat. Even if you documentary makers lie in your films, we don't do it in advertisements.* The filmmakers once again question the status of their film and the work of documentarians in general in a scene with a furious fisherman who found out that there is no hypermarket. When asked what the whole story has taught him, he replies: *Never trust filmmakers.* Similar moments indicating the authors' intervention are numerous. The entire motion picture is interrupted – as is the practice of many TV stations – by advertisements, but the ones shown here promote the opening of Cesky Sen. From the casting footage of families, supervised by consumer behaviour specialist Dr Jitka Vysekalova, we are shown only interviews whose participants expressed their enthusiastic attitude towards supermarkets and spending free time in them (*I love supermarkets. I find them a source of great joy. You can really relax in a hypermarket*). In one of the scenes a woman says: *This is not a dream, this is reality, this is Harmony.* When the director asks: *What did you say?* and wants her to repeat the sentence, she once again recites her (?) reflection.

In a scene shot after the Kudrnov family left the supermarket, the director asks one of the women to sing something in front of the camera. She immediately agrees and performs together with her daughter an old folk song, in broken English but in tune:

*Hey, ho, nobody's home
meat or drink nor money have I none
Everybody will be happy
Hey, ho, nobody's home.*¹³

We then hear a replay, this time with a professionally arranged orchestral backup and accompanied by a magnificent sunset. During an earlier conversation with the filmmakers the same woman declared: *Our lives are short, let's live them the best way we can.* Curiously, the hypermarket's anthem¹⁴ features both a reference to the lyrics of her song (*a když nemá ani halir/if you have no money*) and to her statement (*život trva jen chvíli/life is but a moment*). In one of the casting scenes, a mother of a teenager admits that she took her daughter on a six-kilometre excursion last weekend, but the girl did not enjoy herself at all; to cheer her up, in the evening they went shopping at Tesco (!) and this made her very happy. One of the directors then

asks the daughter to describe how she felt at the store after that exhausting walk. The girl replies: *It was... I don't know... as if it had been raining all day long and then I suddenly saw that the Sun came out. It was cool, fun and pleasant.* Strangely, the teenager's sentence turns out to have far-reaching consequences for the whole film. The fictitious hypermarket's anthem mentions, i.a. shopping that can brighten up a cloudy day (*Jak mohou ruže kvesti, když je pošmourný den...*). After the Kudrnov family leaves Tesco and all push their full carts towards the parking lot, one of the women suddenly cries: *Look, the Sun is setting.* Klusak and Remunda decided to arrange their grand "opening" on 31 May 2003, the day of a solar eclipse. In one of the scenes the directors are driving a car at dawn (we see the Sun rising) and the radio's presenter is heard saying: *Today we shall witness a solar eclipse. The rising Sun will be unable to shine. On the contrary, it will be more of a shrinking crescent* (an amusing association with the scene of casting the families, when a woman asked what name she would choose for the new hypermarket answers: "Horn of plenty"). The announcer then goes on to say: *You should not look at this fascinating phenomenon for too long. Get up in the morning and put on your special eyeglasses.* And we see both directors in their Hugo Boss suits looking at the sky through darkened pieces of glass, while in the background resounds the hypermarket's anthem about rose-tinted spectacles (*Tak přijď se radovat jak dite/ spousta veci omami te/cely svet mužeš mit. Chce to jenom trochu chtit/chce to jenom nelenosit/zaparkovat, vzit si košík, neproměškat velký den/přišel k nam vaš český sen*). Later, a woman who came three hours before the opening explains that she never participates in this kind of events but her husband woke her up to see the eclipse, so she came incidentally. Weather on the grand "opening" day was beautiful and sunny (as emphasised by those who gathered on the Letnany meadow), but rain poured when the hoax came to light and it turned out that there is no hypermarket. Not one is in sight when across the wet windshields of a car driving away the camera shows the increasingly distant façade of the Cesky Sen hypermarket. We get the impression that the day is coming to a close, although in reality the scene could have been (and probably was) shot on a completely different day. Moreover, at the end of the film newspaper headlines express outrage at the hoax, men replace street posters advertising the hypermarket with advertisements of cigarettes and credit cards, and the last scene is... a sunset; this time it seems to refer not to the feelings of the would-be clients, but to the second game that the directors were playing with the audience. All the elements fit together as in a jigsaw puzzle. Mention is due, however, to one more signal sent by the directors, albeit not in this particular film. They had prepared two trailers ("bloodless" and

"bloody"), of which the latter certainly appears to be staged not only because the scenes it contains are not featured in the finished film. It shows how after would-be clients found out about the hoax the crowd set off in pursuit after the escaping directors, who managed to jump into a car. Two brawny men, however, step in front of a crowd composed of predominantly senior citizens, one of them taking a baseball bat out of his car's trunk and bashing it against the front windscreen of the filmmakers' vehicle. Then the "bald one" drags them out of the car, start shoving, beating and kicking them, and tears the Hugo Boss suits into shreds while a miniskirt-wearing woman enthusiastically batters them with her handbag, presumably spewing obscenities, while the oldsters shout and shake their fists. The filmmakers finally manage to break free and, covered in blood, run in slow motion in the camera's direction. The overall intention is to create the impression of an authentic end to the whole story, although the directors assure that no blows were dealt. Interestingly, the DVD release of *Czech Dream* featured 32 minutes of bonus footage missing from the final cut, while the film's official website includes photos of bloodied directors in ripped clothes next to photos actually inserted in the film. Finally, press material prepared by the distributor for journalists included photos exclusively from the "bloody" trailer.

First on the Moon

The Russian mockumentary is still in its infancy. Aleksei Fedorchenko's 2005 *Perviy na Lune* (First on the Moon), awarded in Sochi¹⁵ and Venice¹⁶ and written by Alexandr Goronovsky and Ramil Yamalayev, is probably one of the first Russian examples of the genre. The fact that local reviewers came up with various neologisms to describe the film, which did not match any categories familiar to them, demonstrates that it was a total novelty in Russian cinematography. Local promotion material described it as *documentary drama (a post-modern hoax)*, and critics wrote about a *pseudo-documentary*,¹⁷ a *documentary farce*,¹⁸ and a *documentary look-alike*.¹⁹ Polish material also called it a *science-fiction quasi-documentary*, while Western reviewers applied the term: *mock-documentary*, already adopted in many countries. In a *documentary style* the film tells the story of an alleged Soviet space project from the 1930s, culminating with a flight to the moon in 1938 and contemplating the absurdities and tragedies, which had to follow a clash between Stalinist mentality and scientific progress. Its protagonists had a chance to enjoy worldwide fame but instead became victims of Stalin's dictatorship. The plot begins in Chile, where the Soviet spaceship landed after returning from the moon, and follows Soviet astronaut Ivan Kharlamov (Boris Vlasov) travelling from Chile

across the Pacific Ocean and China to Mongolia, until he is captured by the NKVD and sent to a psychiatric hospital, from which he eventually manages to escape and, changing his identity in Zelig fashion, to stay on the run from the secret police. Fedorchenko mixes various footage ranging from authentic period film newsreels (sports parade in the Red Square) and fragments of Vasili Zhuravlyov's 1936 sci-f film *Kosmicheskiy reys: Fantisticheskaya novella* (The Space Voyage), to scenes meticulously shot to resemble period newsreels, imitating NKVD operational materials with suitably distorted picture and sound and subtitles made to look old. The interspersed contemporary scenes shot in colour apply the form of a documentary investigation as they follow the ups and downs of people involved in the programme (i.a. Ivan Kharlamov, female athlete Nadezhda Svetlaya and circus dwarf Mikhail Roshchin). Fedorchenko declared: *Viewers should discover the game's rule on their own and decide whether they want to participate in it or not.*²⁰ As all mockumentaries, also this one finally reveals its actual status in the closing credits, according to which actors portrayed all the characters. Sometimes, the film is amusing (information about shooting archival footage with the aid of hidden, several-centimetre cameras, a dwarf joining the spaceship crew because the size of the spaceship was undetermined, words spoken by a guardian of the NKVD archives: *Since everything included here was filmed it really took place*, or nostalgic. Fedorchenko said: *The element of irony is very small, perhaps about 5 percent. The rest is something of a homage to the generation of our fathers and grandfathers, including their honesty and genuine belief in ideas.*²¹ The funny and self-reflective film has the qualities of a mock-documentary, but the director protests against this term and several others used to describe his work: *We didn't aim for mystification, but for a fantasy drama. Terms like "post-modernism" and "mock-documentary" are not what we intended. Perhaps the genre is documentary fantasy.*²² The director distances himself from the film's associations with Viktor Pelevin's space novel *Omon Ra*, because it was not his purpose to bring down myths but to recreate the grotesque and tragic character of the past and to symbolically commemorate people who fell victim to a policy intent on proving the greatness of the USSR at any cost. Fedorchenko regarded the heroism of volunteers taking part in the secret programme and put through gruelling training just to become superfluous and destroyed by the system as very important and quite a challenge. The director reportedly spent half a year watching old film newsreels to create an exact replica of the visual documentary styles of the 1930s. Thanks to the mastery of cinematographer Anatoly Lesnikov and production designer Nikolay Pavlov the film makes a great job of "imitating" old newsreels, even though 90% of it is actually

footage shot today. Kovalov noted: *Fedorchenko does not imitate the arbitrary "flow of life"; instead, he imitates the normative aesthetics of officious film-journals – educational, instructional, and other types of applied films intended for use in "official work". He reproduces precisely this method of staging... it is distinctively "an imitation of an imitation". (...) He creates a genuinely monumental image of a unified aesthetics. It is important to remember that in a commissioned film, shots of an official parade are different from shots of a sports parade; that the political leadership was to be filmed in one way and ordinary citizens in another; and that in different periods of Soviet power these norms changed.*²³

The film starts with the following caption: *Status of the film material does not meet the accepted standards of quality, but it has been included in the film due to its uniqueness.* This announcement suggests that we shall be dealing with archival footage of considerable significance, although genuine period material constitutes 10% of the whole film and is composed of widely known photographs that do not bring anything new to the film but boost its credibility. Although Fedorchenko protests against his film being described as a mockumentary it certainly has a mock-documentary dimension to it and thus can be analysed and interpreted as such. The director constructed the film using elements typical for a documentary: iconography, black-and-white archival newsreels and period film material (secret NKVD footage) as well as present-day "talking heads" commentary (shot in colour). Some 90% are look-alikes, which the director – as in every mockumentary – indirectly suggests to us from time to time, and the "talking heads" are actually actors, although obviously we do not find out until the final credits. In this case, laughable statements made by some of the characters should be recognised as hints about the real status of *First on the Moon*. Allegedly discussing the filmed events, their comments actually concern something completely different, are taken out of their original context, and when introduced into that of the film sound outright absurd. *First on the Moon* begins with a large close-up, which viewers misled by the title may identify as the surface of the moon. As the camera pulls back, however, it turns out that this is the Earth, with someone digging with a hoe. Black-and-white footage, as if from an old newsreel, shows Chilean peasants who, naturally in their native language, describe – the commentary suggests – a huge meteorite. *We immediately called the police* – says one of them – *but what can our police do? When my wife was robbed, they arrived two months later.* Since the closing credits feature information that material from the site where the "Chilean orb" fell is property of a Chilean natural science museum, the footage may actually be genuine; more, the peasants may be really discussing a meteorite, but the audience usually does not know

what the film's various non-Russian speaking witnesses are saying, because their comments are drowned out by a Russian translator. Comic image-commentary juxtapositions also act as a signal, e.g. the black-and-white "newsreel" *Soyuzkinozhurnal nr. 54 noyabr 1936* titled: *Continuing Tsiolkovsky's Work*. The off-screen narrator speaks about Young Pioneers repeating Tsiolkovsky's experiment with a special centrifuge, and we see them putting a goose into a pot placed on a bicycle wheel, covering the pot with a lid and turning the wheel; finally, once the task is accomplished, they raise their arms in a Pioneers' greeting. Another scene shows thoughtful older men in white overalls, probably scientists, surrounded by metal skulls, ribs and spines. One of them in earnest explains the goal of their research: the creation of a Soviet man with metal bones, which will protect him in a collision with a car. Another example – an alleged Secret Service instruction film: *The Technique of Applying the SK-29 Camera for Secret Observation*, with the caption: *For professional use only*. The voice-over informs us: *Cameras are used for obtaining materials compromising the subject* and the black-and-white footage shows a girl standing by a bed and a man... shaving her legs. In the same absurd instruction film a soldier takes a small camera out of a briefcase, with the commentary explaining: *You can hide the SK-29 camera anywhere you want, in a briefcase, in a woman's purse, on the street and in a room*. A caption appears: *Unfold the shoulder strap*. An off-screen directive instructs: *The camera may be used without a stand in assorted situations*. Caption: *Keep your distance*. We see a woman and right behind her – a spy with a briefcase filming her. In another allegedly secret NKVD material in Fedorchenko's film the off-camera commentary informs us: *Subject under observation – Ivan Kharlamov*, and we see Kharlamov (or rather the actor portraying him) walking up to a street stall, buying matches, entering a room, lying down on a bed, walking up to a window and looking out of it while smoking a cigarette. The comical nature of the whole situation is the effect of a juxtaposition of serious off-screen commentary with the completely insignificant nature of situations from the life of the observed subject filmed by the secret, hidden camera and the very fact that such trivial material was preserved in the archive.

An even more interesting signal comes from a fragment supposedly shot at the Film Archive in Moscow, where an old curator of the NKVD archive, walking among shelves full of film cans, says: *Since everything included here was filmed, it had actually taken place*. Next, black-and-white footage pretends to be archival material from the 1930s and shows Ivan Sergeyevich Kharlamov; the off-screen narrator informs us that Kharlamov was wounded when suppressing a rebellion in Turkistan, but we see him in an idyllic scene, delightedly posing for the camera while sitting on a

camel. At this stage, there comes to mind a question: why do these presumed remnants of old newsreels focus on Kharlamov (clearly the only person the camera follows) already before he became a renowned, accomplished engineer? And if this is confidential material shot by the Secret Services, planning to recruit him, then why did Kharlamov (and only he) react to the camera's presence (look in its direction, wave)? In addition, the opinion voiced by the archivist is complemented by a statement made by a man bedridden in hospital, probably a former agent, who says: *You are asking strange questions, comrade director. There was nothing of this sort. My memory is good but I don't remember anything*. Both declarations sound especially interesting in the context of one of the film's last scenes, with soldiers burning numerous film reels taken out of cans, probably property of the archive shown earlier. Another hint are the fake smiles of the persons posing for the camera. One of the metal bone scientists is artificially and nervously laughing directly at the camera, although his colleagues seem not to notice this, absorbed by their urgent activities. Since what they are saying is ridiculous and their occupation is absurd, this man's conduct questions their gravity, producing the impression that he is unable to help laughing and slip into the appointed role as earnestly as his colleagues. Amusing doubts can also be inspired by the film's iconography. The colour footage displays an old book with Chinese writing and prints supposedly presenting the construction of a spaceship. The off-camera commentary discusses spaceship constructors from, i.a. the eleventh century, a treatise on this subject dating back to 1320, and nineteenth-century Russia, where battle missiles and submarines were designed. The documents, prints and old encyclopaedias on display may all be authentic but they do not necessarily show what the commentary is suggesting. The same holds true for some of the possibly genuine newsreel fragments accompanied by not automatically true commentaries, e.g. a fragment of a newsreel with couples dancing at some sort of a ball (perhaps on New Year's Eve) features commentary claiming that the ball celebrated Kharlamov's accomplishments. Typically for a mock-documentary the film also contains fabricated newspaper cuttings with headlines matching the film's topic, e.g.: *The last of the astronauts passed away in his workshop before the production of our film wrapped up*. We see young people putting a spaceship into a chest. *The project was terminated, people disappeared. Now it turns out that there was nothing. But there was a rocket*. We see some kind of a black-and-white chronicle, with street traffic and a paperboy. Narration: *In March 1938 news about the fall of a fireball in Chile was in all the papers*. We are shown people reading newspapers on a tram and old press headlines: *"Herald Express": Passengers of "Fortuna" airliner saw*

a fire ball; “El Mercurio”: *El Sol cayo Sobre Chile. Ovnis o pruebas militares?* (The Sun fell over Chile), “L’Echo de Paris”: *Meteorite? Comete? Martiens?*, “Il Buonsenso”: *La Sfera Cilena – I Dei sono ritoranti in Cile?* (Chilean globe. The gods returned to Chile?), “Daily Express”: *The Chilean Ball – a League of Nations Special commission investigation*. A headline: *The secret of the Chilean globe revealed*. Narration: *A shepherd found debris of foreign aircraft in the mountains*. Caption: *Chile. 200 kilometres north of the town of Olyagua. The area where the “Chilean globe” fell*. Off-screen commentary: *The Chilean globe fell on 24 March 1938. Suprun’s rocket took off a week before on 16 March. Our production crew went to Chile. We watch the trip: And we found it. A tiny part of the dashboard of the very first Soviet spaceship. Local peasants sold the rest for 125 dollars*. The film also contains look-alike elements introducing mystery, conspiracy and secrecy, e.g. frames from supposed NKVD footage with German officers (actors in costumes, we learn later) observing candidates for the secret mission diving into water. When the director asks Fattakhov: *How did the Germans come about?*, he replies that he does not know, because this was a secret project. No further comments, because the planted suggestion is supposed to stir the viewers’ imagination. Successive takes illustrating the secret project show water being poured on the candidates (as in old psychiatric hospitals) and then soldiers leading a... piglet with implemented electrodes. Next, *Material no. 9*: a piglet in a spacesuit is placed into a rocket and launched. The animal then lands with a parachute and two soldiers pose with it for a photograph.

Apart from the mock-documentary-style film newsreels in Sergey Livnev’s *Serp i molot* (Sickle and Hammer; 1994), the list of Fedorchenko’s significant predecessors includes Vitali Mansky’s project *Chastniye kroniki. Monolog* (Private Chronicles. Monologue; 1999) – a compilation of amateur video films the director received from people from every former Soviet republic, telling the story of a fictitious protagonist born on the day before Yuri Gagarin’s space flight (11 April 1961); his death coincides with the end of the Soviet era.

Polish mock-documentary parodies

The Polish cinema as yet has not featured such spectacular mock-documentaries as the examples discussed above. Nonetheless, one of the first films in which certain (Degree I) mockumentary elements can be found is Krzysztof Gradowski’s 11-minute TV film: *Déjà vu czyli skąd my to znamy* (Déjà Vu or Where Have We Seen This, 1978), realised at Studio Miniatur Filmowych, a parody of popular educational films and programmes shown at the time as part of so-called school series. Just like a full-blown mock-documentary it ridicules the documentary style, statements of so-

called ordinary people caught on camera, TV comments by experts, professionals and specialists, scientific jargon and empty rhetoric, scientific discourse, etc. The film begins with thank-you’s listing the people who helped with its production, but this time gratitude is expressed in an absurd way, mocking the custom adopted by many directors. The voice-over says: *From the Author. I consider it to be a pleasant duty to thank Prof. Jerzy Borówa, Ph.D., for his sympathetic attitude to the film’s project presented to him at the Magnolia restaurant. The screenplay was based on the theses of his fundamental work: Rewarding Positive Adjustments* (a black-and-white photograph with an autograph below it. The man in the photo moves, takes his glasses off, smokes a cigarette and then freezes in a new pose). *I also want to publicly express my gratitude to Assistant Professor Jan Pracx for his acceptance of the three-dimensional method assumed during the film’s production. Thanks to his kind consent we have obtained a complete perspective illusion, which will require the viewer to maintain absolute discipline of looking at the left side of the frame with the left eye and, respectively, at its right side with the right eye* (the man in the photograph is smoking a pipe and reading a book). *I would like to thank the management of the Division of Assignments at the Department of Resources of the Ministry of Imitated Illusions for letting me study the practical benefits of optimistic perception* (the man in the photo is drinking alcohol). *Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Director Kuliszka who by withholding special care and an atmosphere of particular sympathy for my modest undertakings decisively contributed to the film’s creation in its present shape and dimensions*. Intertitle with caption: *Case 1 and the sound of some sort of an off-camera psychiatric examination: Man aged 48, railway worker, does not admit to any hereditary dispositions. As a child often used to skip school to go to the movies. Masturbates since 14. While hypnotised confessed to an on-and-off sexual relationship with a seamstress living nearby. Previously sought the aid of an herbalist*. We hear the patient’s account (dubbed by Krzysztof Kowalewski): *This is what happened. I’ll describe it in chronological order. I was crossing the street in no particular hurry because I was already late. I’m walking, it’s cold, and I’m thinking to myself: “Good thing I’m wearing a warm padded jacket”*. Now, a doctor’s office, with a model of the human brain standing on the desk. A staged visit of the patient follows, shot in black-and-white. The railway worker on one side, the stone-faced professor (portrayed by Jan Himilbach) on the other, taking notes and tapping his pencil against the table-top. When the patient starts talking we watch the discussed events in colour: *I came closer and saw Africa on the Kaiser-panorama poster. “I’m going to take a look at it”, I’m thinking to myself, because I am a fan of all things exotic. To my surprise the pictures show me walking through the snow, but with whom and where?*

Something wasn't right. "Oh well, I can still afford to pay 6 zlotys for the ticket", I thought to myself and went inside. Poor decision, but I wanted to see what was going to happen next. I sit down, arrange the device, and guess what I see? My entire life right in front of my eyes. First, the town house in 16 Kozła Street, where I was born. More, I grew up there. Then my wedding photo. I got married in Łódź and, honestly, it was great fun, but only the wedding. I'm still looking at the photos: now I'm in a steam engine, laughing, at work, not really looking like myself. Later I'm shown being rewarded for putting a freight train from Elk on a side track because otherwise it would have massacred the 386 passenger train from Toruń. Never mind. But then I see myself looking into the camera in front of the Kaiser-kamera place, and this got me really annoyed because a moment later I was once again walking through the snow, and so on, the same thing over and over again. It is not about the six zlotys; I wonder what's wrong with me. Back in the professor's room: There is absolutely no need to worry. From a scientific point of view the case is banal. Here is a chart. The professor reaches for a chart with a brain diagram. The whole screen becomes filled with an animated colourful diagram featuring circled areas captioned with mysterious abbreviations. To simplify matters, let us assume there are three consciousness zones. It is your sub-consciousness that transmits certain images. The shapes and colours reflected by the Kaiser-kamera are then presented by the consciousness as reality. Stratton discussed this phenomenon already a long time ago. Diagrams and drawings with animated arrows describe Stratton's experiment. After each bath he used to recall the image preceding it for the purpose of marking the cleanliness scale. See, you should always look ahead to a bright future. Titlecard with caption: Case 2. Voiceover: Former model, aged 35, currently a teen fashion designer. Complains that people closest to her fail to understand her. Speaks of herself as a man. Since her stay in Paris, which she visited as a correspondent of the "Młoda moda" weekly, has been involved in flagellation and horseback riding, uses Old Spice cosmetics and a Kharkov electric razor. Has a neglected personality inventory. At the same time, the professor and the woman (Lucyna Winnicka) are arguing. Professor: Please calm down. Try to imagine that it was I who came to you and not the other way round. I'm listening. Woman: I've always liked fruit drops. I used to enjoy 20 to 35 decagrams a day. Three months ago a doctor forbade me to eat sweets due to hyperacidity. Ever since then I've been dreaming the same thing over and over again. The woman's fantasy world is now presented in colour. I dream that I am completely alone. An envoy of the president of New Heartburn usually appears more or less an hour before dawn. He asks me to come in (castle, women in men's clothes). They hypnotise me and offer the position of Minister of Confectionery. I agree and accept gifts (piles of gifts). Then the doctor appears in the form of a hideous insect. The professor has dozed off.

Professor! the woman cries, he wakes up and says: Oh well, take a teddy bear from a child and he will dream about a bear (reaches for a chart). Compensatory delusions, a somewhat infantile reaction, but entirely proper. We are shown diagrams and charts with animated arrows. The professor's voiceover explains the determination of the subject matter of dreams: At the stage of non-rapid eye movement sleep your appetite for fruit drops selectively activates the cerebral cortex and cortical centres of the brain, in this way creating dreams. Their subject matter, regarded as reprehensible and repressed in a given culture, easily matches the accepted norms of another culture. This is why I think you should leave for some time and, so to speak, just look around. The slightly disappointed woman smiles with a sceptical look. Titlecard with caption: Case 3. Voiceover: Patient aged 27, delivery driver. Claims that as a child he took part in games played with a turkey. Has been drinking exclusively rectified spirit ever since a young boy. As a school student was tempted by – as he described it – chemical experiments. Together with a storeman of the enterprise employing him sentenced to two years in prison for setting fire to a warehouse. Pills received from the prison doctor did not help. Animated chart presents a Hans Kuliszka experiment, drawings and arrows. Examined with the Roschach test and put through the Kuliszka experiment, expressed readiness to change his surname, profession and remuneration. The professor requests: Please take off your glasses. Chewing on a match, the patient (dubbed by Stefan Friedman) takes off his shades and says: My wife and mother-in-law forced me to make this appointment. The point is that I was on a business trip with my colleague to Częstochowa and as usual we stayed at the Dworcowy hotel. We entered the room, the window curtains were drawn, and just to fool about I told my friend: "Want to bet that there's a firefighter on the roof of the home across the street?". He replied: "Yeah, right", opened the curtains and there really was a fireman, asleep, by the way. A colour film shows a firefighter sleeping on the roof of the house across the street. I also would like to mention that I haven't seen the fireman before nor knew him, so I couldn't be in league with him, because as soon as Kazek realized that he lost the bet he accused me of plotting the whole thing with the fireman. And my wife sent me here because this is not the first time that something like this happened. Professor: Great. You know what, the thing is that you experience déjà vu in its pure form with no unnecessary components. The professor clammers on his knees onto the desk while the patient is glad that his affliction is unique. The professor, up to now uptight, bored and drowsy, finally stirs: I am going to build a theory based on your case. An animated chart presents Wrangel's curve, omitting Prof. Białkowski's points. Professor's voiceover: We shall give Prof. Białkowski something to talk about. We shall deform Wrangel's curve and raise the threshold of possibility. The railway worker

walks through the snow. The same voice, which previously read the author's thank-you letter, now says: *In other words, we can allow ourselves to enjoy a moment of happiness. Yet another blank spot has disappeared from the map of the extensive field of knowledge about the world and life of man. A clear and concrete explanation of the phenomenon of déjà vu is another step taken on the path to an increasingly complete comprehension of man's conscious and socially shaped existence. Our accomplishments once again confirm that obstinacy and, most of all, competence are decisive for success in each domain of creative investigation.*

From beginning to end, the film's amusingly absurd plot is the reason why its construction resembles that of a typical educational production with experts, diagrams, discussions of concrete examples illustrating scientific theories, etc. The ensuing parody challenges the viewers' trusts in films of this kind and habitual belief in their "veracity". It also questions their status of "serious cinematic form" which as it turns out, can incorporate an absurd topic while keeping all ingredients intact.

One of the first films recalled in this context²⁴ is Marek Piwowski's *Egzekucja długów, ludzi...* (Execution of Debts, Men..., 2001), a parody of investigative TV shows with a journalist interviewing the witnesses and participants of a given event and from time to time offering his own commentary. The film is dedicated to an old-age pensioner-victim of a bank swindle orchestrated by an alleged businessman. The pensioner recounts the events on camera, with the film crew following him to the bank and shooting his conversation with the imposter. Although everything about the film appears to be rather realistic, Degree III mockumentariness is "spoiled" at the very beginning for the sake of Degree I mockumentariness when the director sends a single, but important signal to the audience by casting himself as the journalist. Naturally, those unfamiliar with Marek Piwowski might treat the film as a journalistic account for much longer. Fans of sophisticated Degree III mock-documentaries, however, regret that the part did not go to someone entirely unknown or, on the contrary, to a celebrated journalist specialising in such broadcasts, especially since the film progresses in an interesting direction by describing the illegal operations of mysterious banks and ways of collecting debts. The "journalist" talks to a gangster – a debt enforcer, who wants to protect his privacy but nonetheless matches our media-shaped belief of how a criminal should look. The film becomes increasingly absurd due to its increasingly fictitious appearance (allusions to the staging applied in factual programmes), and ends with acts of violence caught on camera. Or perhaps this is only our imagination (we witness the practice of evoking the pursuit of sensational news and references to the "accidental" filming of "live" events).

Endnotes

- ¹ See: B. Kosińska-Krippner, *Mock-documentary a dokumentalne fałszerstwa*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2006 no. 54-55.
- ² Planete channel broadcast the film in 2005 as: *Operacja księżyc*. During the Fantastic KINO.LATO Festival at the Kino.Lab cinema in Warsaw (1 July – 2 September 2006) the film was shown as: *Operacja Luna*.
- ³ Producer: Point du Jour Production and Arte France.
- ⁴ The interview was published on Arte's website: <http://arte-tv.com/de>.
- ⁵ <http://www.planete.p/cgi-bin/pla/forum/topic/1-52-51/1>.
- ⁶ T. Sobolewski, *Kosmiczna manipulacja*, "Gazeta Wyborcza" 1 April 2005, p. 17.
- ⁷ Planete used this title.
- ⁸ Other viewers, including the author of this text, noticed the dog already on the first occasion with no need to watch the film frame by frame.
- ⁹ <http://www.tvp.pl/View?Cat=1874&Sid=199905>.
- ¹⁰ Fantastic KINO.LATO Festival 1 July 2006 – 2 September 2006, KINO.LAB in Warsaw.
- ¹¹ Quotation from press material supplied by Vivarto, the film's distributor.
- ¹² T. Jopkiewicz, *Na druga stronę*, <http://film.onet.pl/9713,24721,1>. The Stopklatka portal also called *Year of the Devil* a false documentary.
- ¹³ The song, one of whose versions dates back to 1609, is known as: *Hey, ho, Nobody Home, Rose, Rose, or Peace Round*. The most popular variants of this particular verse are the following:
*Hey, ho, nobody's Home
meat nor drink nor money have I none
Still I will be very, very merry*
or
*Hey, ho, nobody's home
meat nor drink nor money have I none
Yet I will be merry*
- ¹⁴ Music Hynek Schneider, words Tomas Hanak.
- ¹⁵ Best debut and critics' award at the Kinotavr festival 2005.
- ¹⁶ Horizons Documentary Prize at the 62nd Venice International Film Festival in 2005.
- ¹⁷ Term used by Oleg Kovalov
- ¹⁸ Russian term used by Viktor Matizen: *asmeshka nad dokumentom* (English: mockery of the document).
- ¹⁹ Russian term used by Andrey Plakov: *poddel'naia dokumentalistika* (English: counterfeit documentary film), in: A Plakov, *Perviy na lune*, "Kommersant" 10 July 2005.
- ²⁰ V. Matizen, *My ne poliruem vremia*, "Novye izvestiya", 6 June 2005.
- ²¹ Quotation after: T. Birchenough, *Inspired Lunacy*, "The Moscow Times", 30 September 2005.
- ²² Ibidem.
- ²³ O. Kovalov, *Aleksei Fedorchenko: First on the Moon (Perviy na lune) 2005*, "KinoKultura. New Russian Cinema", 14 January 2006 <http://www.kinokultura.com/2006/11r-firstmoon1.shtml>.
- ²⁴ W. Godzic, *Telewizja i jej gatunki po "Wielkim Bracie"*, Kraków 2004, pp. 193-194.

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Aleksander Jackiewicz (1915-1988) – film theorist and critic, essayist, writer, professor at the Institute of Art of Polish Academy of Sciences, a longtime teacher at Film School in Łódź. Author of many books on film: *Gorki i film* (*Gorki and Film*, 1955), *Latarnia czarnoksiężska* (*Laterna Magica*, 1956), *Film jako powieść XX wieku* (*Film as a Novel of 20th-century*, 1968), *Historia literatury w moim kinie* (*Literature History in my Cinema*, 1974), *Antropologia*

filmu (*Film Anthropology*, 1975), *Gwiazdozbiór* (*Constellation*, 1983), *Moja filmoteka* (*My Film Archive*, 1983), *Kino polskie* (*Polish Cinema*, 1983), *Kino na świecie* (*Film of the World*, 1983).

Wiesław Juszcak – art historian, philosopher. Professor at the Institute of Art of Polish Academy of Sciences and Institute of Art History of University of Warsaw (where he was a longtime teacher). Author of dozens important books and articles on 19th and 20th century art, Young Poland Movement, art theory, ancient Greece, archaic art, Japanese aesthetic and film history. Lately he received PEN Club Award (2010) and Gloria Artis Award of Ministry of Polish Culture (2012).

Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007) – Polish journalist and writer, one of the top Polish writers most frequently translated into foreign languages. He was often named the “Third World Chronicler” or the “Voice of the Poor” for his famous reportages and books describing developing countries on all continents. Among other books, he published: *The Emperor* on Ethiopia, *Shah of Shahs* about Iran, *The Shadow of the Sun* about Africa, *Another Day of Life* about Angola, and *Imperium* about the Soviet Union.

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Marta Leśniakowska – Professor, art and architectural historian at the Institute of Art Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. She is the author of *Polski dwór, wzorce architektoniczne, mit, symbol* [The Polish manor house, architectural models, myths, and symbols], 1992; *Co to jest architektura?* [What is architecture?], 1996; *Architekt Jan*

Koszczyk Witkiewicz (1881-1958) i budowanie w jego czasach [Jan Koszczyk Witkiewicz (1881-1958): architect and building in his times], 1998; series of books *Architektura w Warszawie* [The Architecture in Warsaw], 1998-2005. She published many texts among other in "Teksty Drugie", "Konteksty", "Modus", "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki", "Rocznik Historii Sztuki".

Wojciech Michera – professor in the Film and Visual Culture Section at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw; member of the editorial board of the academic journal "Konteksty"; lecturer at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw. He is primarily interested in narratology applied to film and visual images; and theories of image and representation. Author of two books: *Anti-Däniken*, 1994, and recently: *Piękna jako bestia. Przyczynek do teorii obrazu* [Beauty as the Beast. Contribution to the Theory of Image], 2010; and more than 40 academic publications (including papers in magazines such as "Konteksty", "Kwartalnik Filmowy", "Teksty Drugie", "Kinowiedziejskie zapiski", "Literatura ludowa", "Bien dire et Bien Aprandre. Revue de Médiévistique"). Translator of many important texts into Polish (by authors such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jaś Elsner) and author of numerous TV shows and educational movies (for TVP and TV Arte).

Grzegorz Nadgrodkiewicz

Tragicomedy dell'arte, or Pierrotade à la Godard

Nadgrodkiewicz reflects on the phenomenon of the durability of a cultural model, i.e. *commedia dell'arte* with its central characters – Pierrot and Columbine. He detects this cultural pattern in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le fou* (1965). In Godard's film this model takes on the form of a peculiar tragic-comedy dell'arte. Ferdinand, the main hero, and his lover Marianne hide their true faces under masks isolating them from the world. They permanently get involved in absurd and grotesque situations, and a series of circumstances leads them inevitably towards the tragic end. Their flight from Paris, car thefts, gunrunning, assaults and unhappy love lead towards death, their final fate. The film is strongly placed in Mediterranean tradition and the pop culture of the 1960s, and its heroes are young people of their time. They have no illusions, are witty and smart, ruthless and self-ironic but desperately helpless in the face of society-imposed commands. Their clownish revolt is doomed to disaster.

Maria Poprzęcka – art historian, essayist. Professor at the Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw, former director of this Institute, she leads Art Historian's Association. She is an author of many books and articles on modern art, 19th century art, methodology of art history, academism, feminine art. In 2009 she received Gdynia Literary Award for her book *Other images. From Alberti to Duchamp*.

Czesław Robotycki (1944-2014) – anthropologist, ethnographer. Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Culture at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, former chief of this Institute. Member of the Editorial Staff of "Konteksty", chief of based in Cracow "Płwnica pod Baranami" Association. Author of many texts and books on problems of contemporary anthropology, methodology of history, ethnography, popular culture.

Aleksandra Rodzińska-Chojnowska, M.A. degree at the Historical Faculty (Warsaw University), 1972 (thesis on John of Salisbury). In 1978 granted Ph.D. degree for dissertation: *Anglo-Norman Intellectuals of the Twelfth Century*, and began translating into the English texts on history, history of art, philosophy and law. Cooperated, and collaborates up to this day with: History Meeting House, Arkady Publishing House, National Museum, Fryderyk Chopin Institute, Sejm Publishing House and DiG Publisher, as well as with periodicals: "Acta Poloniae Historica", "Dzieje Najnowsze", "Konteksty. Polska Sztuka Ludowa", "Kwartalnik Historyczny", "Muzealnictwo", "Teatr Lalek" and "Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae". Since 2000 translated into the English, i.a. Iwona Taida Drózd, *The Buddhist Kingdom of Lo*, Warszawa 2001; Anna Masłowska, *Chronicle of Exhibitions at National Museum in Warsaw 1862-2002* vol. 1. 1862-1962, Warszawa 2002; vol. 2. 1963-1982, Warszawa 2006; *The History of Polish Diplomacy X-XX c.* (eds. Gerard Labuda, Waldemar Michowicz), Warszawa 2005; *Federalism in the History of Poland: "The Free with the Free, the Equal with the Equal"*, Warszawa 2008; *The Lebenstein Code: Poland during the Twentieth Century along the Traces of Drawings by Jan Lebenstein*, Warszawa 2010; Andrzej Rottermund, *Warsaw*, Warszawa 2000; Wojciech Fijałkowski, *Wilanów Vademecum*, Warszawa 2011; Mariusz Karpowicz, *What the Façades of Wilanów Tell Us*, Warszawa, 2011.

Teresa Rutkowska – editor-in-chief of „Kwartalnik Filmowy” („Film Quarterly”). Her research interests centre on the narrative strategies in fiction and non-fiction film. Published in "Kwartalnik Filmowy", "Konteksty" and "Nowe Książki".

Sławomir Sikora – Assistant Professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw. His main research interests cover: visual anthropology, anthropology of death, urban anthropology and methodological issues connected with anthropology. Author of *Fotografia. Między dokumentem a symbolem* [Photography. Between Document and Symbol, 2004], *Film i paradoksy wizualności. Praktykowanie antropologii* [Film and Paradoxes of Visuality. Practicing Anthropology, 2012], co-editor of *Zanikające granice. Antropologizacja nauki i jej dyskursów* [Disappearing Borders. Anthropologisation of Science and Its Discourses, 2009, with Adam Pomieciński]. He has also published numerous articles in, among others, "Kwartalnik Filmowy", "Kultura Współczesna", "Kontek-

sty”, “Lud”. Co-author of the film *Żeby to było ciekawe... O mediatyzacji obrzędów weselnych* [Making it interesting... A film on mediatization of wedding rituals, 2009, with Karolina Dudek].

Anna Sobolewska – professor, historian of literature, a literary critic and an essayist. Since 1970's she has been working in the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in the department of contemporary literature and literary communication. She has also classes with students of film studies at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. Her main research sphere is the relation of literature and mysticism and the poetics of inner experiences. She is specially interested in the lay mysticism of everyday life in the works of poets and writers of the 20th c. Her other spheres of interest embrace transformations of narrative forms, comparative literature, film studies and the new media of today. She is the author of books: *Polish Psychological Prose 1945-1950* (1979); *The Mysticism of Everyday. The Poetics of Inner Experiences* (1992); *Maximally Successful Existence. Essays on the Life and Creative Work of Miron Białoszewski* (1997); *Masks of God. Essays on Writers and Mystics* (2004); *Spiritual Maps of Today. What Has Been Left for Us after New Age?* (2009). Her book *Cela. A Reply to Down Syndrome* (2002) is a autobiographical narrative about her daughter Cecylia with Down Syndrome. She is a member of many associations promoting mentally handicapped people, of educational and literary associations as well as social platforms of religious dialogue and reconciliation of Christians and Jews.

Kuba Szpilka – ethnologist (graduate of the Jagellonian University, then studied in the Institute of Art at the Polish Academy of Sciences). Mountaineer, alpinist. Author of numerous articles, published in “Konteksty” and in “Tatry” (a magazine of the Tatra National Park). His texts have been published in numerous compilation, such as *Mitologie popularne* (edited by D. Czaja, 1994). Author of the books: *Bóg się rodzi* (along with M. Krupa and J. Mikołajewski, with illustrations by J. Wilkoń), *Zakopiańczycy. W poszukiwaniu tożsamości* (along with M. Krupa and P. Mazik, 2011) and *Ślady, szlaki, ścieżki* (along with M. Krupa and P. Mazik, 2013). Curator of numerous museal exhibitions: *Zakopiańczycy. W poszukiwaniu tożsamości* (2011), *Wyprawa. Pośród tatrzańskich i zakopiańskich idei* (2013), *PRL pod Giewontem* (2013). Co-organizer of the conference titled *Ekstremalnie* (2013). Co-founder of „Zakopiańczycy. W poszukiwaniu tożsamości” foundation. Lives in Kościelisko.

Ludwik Stomma – anthropologist, writer, essayist. Professor at EPHE and Sorbonne in Paris, former researcher at the Jagiellonian University and Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. Author of dozens books and articles on anthropology and history. He is also author of popular commentaries published in “Polityka” weekly.

Tomasz Szerszeń – anthropologist, art historian, photographer. A graduate of the Inter-faculty Individual Studies in the Humanities at the University of Warsaw and the Photography Department of National Film, Television and Theatre School in Łódź, recently granted a Ph.D. degree in Humanities. Researcher in Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences. Granted a stipend of Ministry of Culture (2007, 2013), French Government (2006, 2008, 2012), Foundation of Polish Science (2010), City of Warsaw Artistic Scholarship (2010). He is a member of editorial board of quarterly “Konteksty” and “View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture”. He is an author of dozens of texts published in books and in such a reviews like “Konteksty”, “Literatura na Świecie”, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, “Res Publica Nowa”, “Dwutygodnik.com”. His artistic projects were presented in Archeology of Photography Foundation in Warsaw, in Exchange Gallery in Łódź, Asymetria Gallery, Nowy Teatr in Warsaw and in Paris Photo 2012 and 2013. His book *Voyagers without map and passport. Michel Leiris and Documents* will appear soon in *Słowo / obraz terytoria* editions.

Monika Sznajderman – anthropologist, publisher. She graduated from the Warsaw University, Faculty of History, Department of Ethnography and the postgraduate studies at the Institute of Art of Polish Academy of Sciences in the Department of Film History and Theory. She obtained her doctorate in 2000. Her doctor's thesis concerned the figure of the jester in culture; she was also engaged in the anthropology of the present (especially in the problems of the visual popular culture) and in the forms of today's popular devoutness and religiosity. She wrote the following books: *The Pest. Mythology of Plague, Cholera and AIDS* (Warsaw 1994), *Biblia pauperum. Essays on the video and popular culture* (Cracow 1998) and *The Jester. Masks and Metaphors* (Gdańsk 2001, Warsaw 2014); also many articles published in the scientific press and cultural magazines. Since 1996 she runs the Czarne Publishers (www.czarne.com.pl), which she founded with her husband, the writer Andrzej Stasiuk.

Jacek Waltoś – painter, sculptor. Professor at Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. He also writes on art. In the sixties he was a co-founder of artistic group Wprost, in the eighties he was linked with artistic independent movement. In 2002 he received Jan Cybis Award.

Jerzy Sławomir Wasilewski – Professor at the University of Warsaw, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. Main areas of interest: peoples of Central Asia and their symbolic culture; long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Mongolia, Siberia, penetrations in Inner and Eastern Asia. Books on shamanism and taboo, articles on symbolic language in ritual and belief, ethnography of travel and globalization.

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