

THE CINEMA AND TRANSCENDENCE

ABSTRACTS

From the Editors – The Thought and the Playground (M. Ch., P. M.)

In his 1948 article “The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo” Alexandre Astruc wrote: “After having been successively a fairground attraction, an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre, or a means of preserving the images of an era, it is gradually becoming a language. By language, I mean a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel. [...] It can tackle any subject, any genre. The most philosophical meditations on human production, psychology, metaphysics, ideas, and passions lie well within its province. It will even go so far as to say that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only the cinema can do justice to them”.

Astruc’s predictions about the powers and future of film that will «express thought» were to a certain extent fulfilled in the times of great filmmakers «writing with their cameras» (Fellini, Bergman). It appears, however, that in the 21st century, the history of cinema returned to its origins and regained its likeness to boulevard theatre; that the ludic function of film has become the most important (if not the only) one, what is more – that cinema, once commercialized, has lost its intellectual capacities and abandoned its aspirations to be, as Germaine Dulac described it, an art of truth and nuance that reveal the immaterial. The consequences of changes that had taken place at the turn of the century have strengthened this impression. Small cinemas with a varied and ambitious repertoire have been supplanted by multiplexes, frequently located at shopping centers, the contemporary fairgrounds, and aspiring to sell their commodities to the greatest possible number of clients, disregarding a more demanding audience.

It should be kept in mind, however, that the cinema is an area where the tendency to blur the boundaries between high and popular cultures – a *sui generis* sign of the times – is clearly visible. Although films of high artistic value, calling for an intellectual commitment of the audience, have become niche phenomena, the problems they address have found their way to commercial productions (which is not new – suffice it to mention noir gangster films or westerns of the 1950’s). However, to say that screenwriters and directors searching for new, original ideas are forced to go beyond the limited spectrum of motifs charac-

teristic of the popular cinema would be a simplification. It is more likely that filmmakers, in an effort to meet all the possible expectations of their audiences, cannot escape from the human need for meaning, from the reflection on human condition, on good and evil or on the ultimate cause of being. But is it actually true that the viewer who considers the cinema primarily as entertainment, actually experiences that need?

It seems that film continues to be an alternative reality where it is possible to cross not only the boundaries of fiction but also those of the socially acceptable. Thanks to the progress of technology, the factory of dreams is now more than ever capable of satisfying the human desire for a more intense, exciting life and of creating an illusion of fulfilment. The eye of the camera offers the viewers a multiple surrogate existence, enabling them to see the represented reality not only from the vantage point of the director, but also from that of the characters. Are we to believe that what the viewers look for is merely a beautiful lie? Does their desire to know go beyond the voyeurism that is sometimes believed to be the essence of cinema? Or does this desire encompass a hope that the film image would reveal «what is hidden» and lead the viewers to the experience of participation in the Mystery?

Perhaps intellectual cinema, engaging the language of the moving image in philosophical reflection, addressing moral, social, psychological and theological problems, is a blind alley in the history of film. Perhaps to provide entertainment based on the development of technology and on human fascination with technology is the very nature of film – both in its fairground infancy and in the era of three-dimensional cinema. Those conjectures though, which seem to be confirmed by statistical data, would be firmly rejected for instance by the organizers of the Festival of Philosophical Film in Cracow, who claim that filmmaking always means philosophizing.

Whether we agree with them or not, settling this question – as it is a question of essence – requires the philosophical method. Such an approach has been adopted by Stanley Cavell and Karen Hanson in the articles on the ontology of film included in the present issue of *Ethos*. Cavell leads the reader towards an answer to the question of what the film is, discussing, among others, the relation between this medium and reality and that of the viewer to the events watched on the screen: a specific «displacement» of the human beings from their natural habitation in the world. Is the distance thus acquired not similar to the attitude towards the reality that makes philosophy possible? Hanson engages in direct polemics with Astruc's views, questioning the claims that film is a language and that it might replace philosophy. She proposes such a relationship between film and philosophy that both areas preserve their identity and support each other.

It is not general philosophical reflection, however, that predominates in the current volume of *Ethos*, but the analyses of the ways in which contemporary cinema tackles the theme of transcendence pertaining, according to Astruc, to the competence of film art.

In their critical analyses, Krzysztof Kornacki, Mariola Marczak and Piotr Klewowski identify different meanings ascribed to the concept of transcendence:

ranging from those inspired by a mature theological awareness to the most fantastic ones, and investigate various artistic means applied to express them.

Waldemar Frąc and Fr. Andrzej Luter reflect on the cinematic representations of death and inner transformation, discussing, respectively, a film triptych by Andrzej Wajda based on the short stories by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, in particular his *Tatarak* [*Sweet Rush*], and two films by young directors, representatives of independent cinema.

A review article by Marek Kotyński, CSSR, on the attempts to capture in film the «phenomenon» of John Paul II may help the readers in realizing the difficulties faced by artists who strive to show the transcendent in the present-day reality. The paper by Magdalena Dylewska on St. John Damascene's theology of the icon can be read as a kind of counterpoint to the texts devoted to the filmmakers' search for «the world beyond.»

Although most authors of this volume focus on the modes of showing transcendence in films, the cinema presenting the reality of «this world» has not been ignored: Joanna Wojnicka sketches a portrait of the Russian cinema of the last twenty years, and Mateusz Werner writes about Polish cinema; both speak both about the history of cinema and about presenting history in cinema, touching upon the relationship between film and politics, or upon historical policy implemented by means of film.

Marcin Adamczak and Jerzy Płażewski describe the present day of the cinema, attempting to diagnose its condition. A theoretical paper by Adamczak is devoted to the Hollywood cinema, which – as the author claims – in the era of globalization is also our own. Płażewski presents the problem of the absence of important foreign films in Polish cinemas and outlines some practical proposals to change the *status quo*.

Not only does film combine various disciplines of art, it can also make them into its object, as well as itself become their object. The former case is discussed by Maciej Nowak, who writes on filming jazz, on the advantages of «watching» the music, and claims that if it is shown well, the «human factor» in art is emphasized. The latter type of encounter with another domain of artistic creation is described – and documented with numerous illustrations – by Maria Kurpik, who presents the history of the Polish film poster, acclaimed in the world and currently experiencing a revival.

The discussion of the capabilities and function of cinema is continued in Fr. Andrzej Luter's interview with Andrzej Wajda, eminent Polish film director. Wajda talks about the role of film – the moving image – under the communist regime, where the word was subject to censorship, while the image – which is a metaphor – was free and thus enabled authentic communication with the spectator.

Do audiences, and also filmmakers, need reflection – present in movies and stimulated by them – on the problems that are both fundamental and ultimate for the human being? The articles collected in the «film» issue of *Ethos* seem to indicate that the need in question, while – as the authors argue – expressed in ways inadequate to its importance, is still alive. The question remains whether this need may be eliminated or suppressed by a desire either for gain or for entertainment so that it will no longer emerge in film art.

If we are to believe philosophers, the need in question is essentially linked to the nature of the human being: there will always be those who even in the playground, amid the crowd gathered to watch the games, preserve the desire – as Cicero in *Tusculan Disputations* reported Pythagoras say – “to observe what was done, and to see in what manner things were carried on there” and who “earnestly look into the nature of things”. Thus if we are to believe philosophers, while a playground will always remain a playground, while the cinema will remain an entertainment, a market, and an industry – the thought inquiring into the essence of things will nevertheless find space for itself.

The Editors of *Ethos* express their deep gratitude to Fr. Andrzej Luter for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this volume.

JOHN PAUL II – “To open up the glorious regions of light” (Address to the people of the communications industry, Los Angeles, USA, 15 September 1987)

In his special address to the people of the communications industry, Pope John Paul II expresses his sincere respect for all the categories of the media represented by those present at the meeting in the Los Angeles Registry Hotel. He stresses the importance and significance of the communications industry in today’s world and the impact of modern communications on the lives of people all over the world.

As the media can be a force for great good or great evil, John Paul II appeals to those gathered at the meeting to promote what is just, fair and true. The Pope stresses that Church has always recognized and taught that people have a right to communicate, and refers to the Decree on the Media of Social Communications *Inter Mirifica* of the Second Vatican Council, where this right is expressly confirmed. The Church recognizes the need for freedom of speech and freedom of the press, just as does the American Constitution. Yet the Church also points to the fact that rights imply corresponding duties. Thus the proper exercise of the right to information demands that the content of what is communicated be true and complete. The obligation to truth and its completeness includes the obligation to avoid any manipulation of truth for any reason. This applies not only to the coverage of news, but to all the work of the people of the media: Truth and completeness should characterize also the content of artistic expression and entertainment. Thus the people of the communications industry are collaborators of truth in the service of justice, fairness and love. The tools they have at their disposal must be employed in the service of people’s right to communicate. Since at the basis of all human rights is the fundamental dignity of the human person, a recognition of this fact must also be a part of their work.

John Paul II refers to the words of his predecessor Pope Paul VI, who pointed that writers and artists are always able to reveal a spark of goodness in the human condition and that at that very instant a glow of beauty pervades their whole work. Therefore they must not cease to ask themselves if what they communicate is consistent with the full measure of human dignity.

John Paul II stresses the responsibility that rests on the people of the communications industry and the community's trust in their good will. The confidence that the community has in them is both a deep honor and a mighty challenge. To conclude his address, John Paul II encourages the people of the communications industry to respect also their own dignity and to cultivate the integrity consonant with it. He stresses that they themselves are more important than success and more valuable than any budget. Thus they must not let their work drive them blindly or enslave them. They are called to what is noble and lofty in human living and have a great part in shaping world culture: to them is entrusted an important portion of the vast heritage of the human race. Therefore in fulfilling their mission they must always be aware of how their activities affect the world community, how they serve the cause of universal solidarity. They must not forget that, as communicators of the human word, they are the stewards and administrators of an immense spiritual power that belongs to the patrimony of mankind and is meant to enrich the whole of the human community.

Summarized by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: communications industry, media, the right to information, ethics of the media, universal solidarity

The published text is the official address of His Holiness John Paul II to the people of the communications industry, delivered in The Registry Hotel, Los Angeles, on 15 September 1987, during his apostolic journey to the United States of America and Canada.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870915_operatori-mass-media_en.html

Maria M. DYLEWSKA – St. John Damascene's Theology of the Icon

The author, who has made the first Polish translation of St. John Damascene's *Contra imaginum calumniatores orationes tres* (*Three Orations Against the Calumniators of the Holy Icons*), presents the views of the Palestinian monk, who lived at the turn of the 8th century AD, on the fundamental meaning of the image in the spiritual life of a human person.

St. John Damascene founded his views on the belief that the process of looking and the sense of sight enable the most perfect and the deepest cognition. He held that without an attentive look we are unable to reach with our thought the hidden sense of the world. The reason is that the world is a symbolic image of the invisible reality.

Contemplative perception of a religious image made by man, an unhurried investigation of the visually given immediate content, leads us to our innermost being. By stimulating the sense of sight contemplation activates the inner, spir-

itual vision towards which the human soul is driven. Such is, according to St. John Damascene, the natural way of man's spiritual growth.

Summarized by *Mirosława Chuda*

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: St. John Damascene, theology of the icon, contemplation, early history of the Catholic Church

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Stanley CAVELL – The World Viewed, or What is Film? (trans. D. Chabrajska)

In his reflections on the ontology of film, Stanley Cavell refers extensively to the views of Erwin Panofsky and André Bazin, frequently engaging in a polemic with these authors.

In the opening part of the text, Cavell discusses ontological differences between film and painting, film and photography, as well as those between a photograph and a recording of sound, in particular of music. He concentrates on an analysis of the concepts of image, likeness and representation, and considers the relations obtaining between a photograph and its object and those between a painting and its object. While exploring the connections of the media of painting, photography and film with reality, the sense and nature of the presentness of the world in the case of each of them, he holds that, owing to its automatism, by removing the human agent from the task of reproduction, photography succeeded in overcoming subjectivity. Thus it maintains the presentness of the world by accepting our absence from it. The reality in a photograph is present to the viewer, while the viewer is not present to it.

In the second part of the article Cavell looks into the ontology of the photograph and confronts it with the ontology of the screen, pointing that in the case of a moving picture successive film frames are projected onto the fixed screen frame, which, philosophically speaking, results in the emergence of a «phenomenological frame,» the image of perfect attention.

The succeeding part of the text is focused on the ontologies of the audience, the actor and the star. The physical presence of the actors to the audience in a theatre is confronted with the «mechanical» absence of the audience in the movies. Cavell briefly refers to the phenomenon of live television in order to explore the presence of a «human something» in a motion picture, evident despite the absence of a live human being in it. Among the issues discussed at this point are the relation between the character played and, respectively, a stage actor and a film performer, the impact of a well played theatre role, namely, an ap-

pealing effect on the audience, and of a well played film role, which is the «birth» of a star. This latter phenomenon is frequently accompanied by the creation of a type of character in the movies.

Then the author discusses the specific forms or genres the medium of cinema has assumed in the course of its history, and in particular explores the issue why popular or folk arts and themes, as well as folk performers and characters, lend themselves to the medium of film. He observes that the legitimate paths of its evolution were opened not by running away from the folk art character of the primitive film, but by developing it within the limits of its own possibilities. Among the primordial archetypes of film productions on the folk art level were success or retribution, sentiment, sensation, pornography, and crude humor, and they all could blossom forth into genuine history, tragedy and romance, crime and adventure, and comedy, as soon as it was realized that they could be transfigured by the exploitation of the unique and specific possibilities of film. Cavell goes on to explore the essence of these possibilities and observes that the first successful movies were not applications of a medium that was defined by given possibilities, but the creation of a medium by their giving significance to specific possibilities. He holds that only the art itself can discover its possibilities, and the discovery of a new possibility is the discovery of a new medium. One of such possibilities in the case of film is the presence of character types with their specific iconography. As Hollywood developed, says Cavell, the original types ramified into individualities.

In the next part of the article, Cavell considers the great movie comedians: Chaplin, Keaton, W. C. Fields, who have formed a set of types that could not have been adapted from any other medium. The creation of this set of types depended upon two conditions of the film medium: first, movie performers cannot project, but are projected, and, second, photographs are of the world, in which human beings are not ontologically favored over the rest of nature.

In the concluding part of the text Cavell reflects on the origins of film and on whether it was a technical invention that gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new art. He holds that unless film captured possibilities opened up by the arts themselves, it is hard to imagine that its possibilities as an artistic medium would have shown up as, and as suddenly as, they did. Thus the cinema at last satisfied the idea of and wish for the world re-created in its own image. Film is art in this sense, because movies arise out of magic; from below the world. The better a film, the more it makes contact with this source of its inspiration; it never wholly loses touch with the magic lantern behind it. Movies reproduce the world magically not by literally presenting us with the world, but by permitting us to view it unseen.

Summarized by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: ontology of film, photography, character types in film, origins of the cinema

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Karen HANSON – Minerva in the Movies: Relations Between Philosophy and Film
(trans. D. Chabrajska)

In the opening part of the article Karen Hanson criticizes Alexandre Astruc's famous declaration that film might supplant philosophy, made in his 1948 article "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera-Stylo." The author questions, essentially, Astruc's claim that film is gradually becoming a language: a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be. In the course of the text, the author argues that film cannot be called a language in the sense of being a vehicle of thought, and questions Astruc's conviction that cinema can tackle any subject, including the most philosophical meditations, psychology, metaphysics, ideas and passions, and that contemporary ideas and philosophies of life are such that only cinema can do justice to them. As has been noted by Stanley Cavell, says Hanson, an important difference between written language and film lies in the fact that, "writing can be read at any tempo, at any length, re-read at will," while looking at a film frame by frame isn't seeing the movie.

The author also puts into doubt Astruc's claim that in order to do justice to contemporary ideas and philosophies of life the cinema must break free from the tyranny of what is visual. Instead, she holds that there are other spheres for the filmmaker in which film may find some companionship with philosophy and their exploitation does not involve breaking film's necessary tie to the visual. Moreover, one cannot say that philosophy has changed its nature, solved or outgrown all its preoccupations and forms and needs new ones. On the contrary, there are branches of philosophy, such as epistemology and moral theory, philosophy of perception and philosophy of mind which always flower with a concern for perspectives and points of view. Since film, too, both presupposes and explores these particular concerns, it is here that we may find a kind of natural affinity between philosophy and film. This affinity can ground mutual support and illumination and it need not destroy their mutual independence. Astruc's call for film to become or supersede philosophy betrays insufficient attention to, or respect for, the possibility of some objectively interesting differences between the two. Astruc's mistake probably lies in the fact that he has overlooked the fact that not all thought is expressed in language.

Since both philosophy and film use examples, the author analyzes the possibility of expressing, by means of film, the instance of self-deception described by Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness*, and points that cinematic accounts of self-

deception can be extremely persuasive, because viewers can view the subjects of film without being viewed by them, which empowers them in judgment. A filmed example of self-deception will be anything but schematic, holds Hanson, while in the traditional activities of philosophy, examples are schematic and tendentious. They are used sometimes to make, sometimes to support, sometimes to destroy a point. In film, exemplification can be the point. Film can offer philosophy instruction on this issue. The philosophical employment of examples involves a standing danger of reductive assertion. Film can teach against, and so help guard against, the philosophical tendency to deaden or to lose the life in examples. And philosophy can return a favor in kind, by making more of the thought of films.

Summarized by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: philosophy of film, film as a medium, film as a language, relations between philosophy and film, function of examples in philosophy and film

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Krzysztof KORNACKI – Images of God and the World Beyond, as seen in Contemporary Cinema

The author provides a tentative description of the images of God and the Divine (which are, traditionally, the focus of dogmatic theology), as they are used in films of the last twenty five years, and points to today's immersion of this subject matter in postmodernist and pop culture.

In this context, some significant tendencies both in genre cinema and in auteur cinema can be perceived. The essential one is expressed in frequent instances of the allegorization of the world beyond (religious topics and motifs become a secular emblem, devoid of the Transcendent). A frequent quality of the cinema in question is the ontological rupture of the diegesis, a factor which impedes film references to the Transcendent. In such instances, one can observe "the evident incommensurability of the metaphysical motif and the generic determinant, the themes and the ways of imagining binding for the given work" (Andrzej Zalewski). This, in turn, evokes the feeling of being distant on the part of the viewer.

Moreover, in contemporary cinema, facing a rapid development of special effects, the metaphysical is increasingly supplanted by the fantastic.

Another tendency of the cinema of the last twenty five years is that to anthropomorphize the Christian heaven. The characters from the sacred history all

too easily assume the human shape, while the world beyond is subject to presentism (the figure of God is frequently used as a secular allegory of either social forces or the existential ones, determining the human life).

A growing popularity of the so-called reversed parable can be observed, as filmmakers frequently present stories about characters who have originally come from the world beyond and thus revalorize the human condition and the temporal reality. Equally popular is the employment of various figures of Christ, which, however, turn out illusory or deceitful (the characters who are supposed to be following the life of Christ alarmingly often turn out to be suffering from mental disturbances). The tendency towards postmodern anthropomorphization is particularly evident in the so-called angel movies. God's messengers are usually fed up with their angelic nature and gladly assume human bodies. Another important tendency of modern cinema is that to sacralize love: the saying «God is love» has been replaced with «love is a god,» the change which can be largely attributed to the impact of Krzysztof Kieślowski's films followed by those made by his continuators.

It is the sacred (in the sense of phenomenology or religious studies) rather than the *sanctum* (the personal God) that prevails on the screen today.

Most modern movies referring to religious topics demonstrate syncretic thinking as their inspiration and, as a result, they resemble New Age patchworks. More frequent than ever before are also apocryphal movies referring to the currently popular view-of-the-world disputes, for instance to the feminist discourse (Mary Magdalene being willingly portrayed) or to the racial one (the figure of black-skinned Christ).

However, some movies made in the recent years are considered by the author as symptomatic for a change of the current situation. Among them are films employing auteur strategies and referring to the stylistics of the past masters of religious cinema (Tarkovsky, Dreyer). Do they herald the time of screen asceticism? Time will show.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: metaphysical movies, the world beyond in the movies, film presentations of the image of God, the transcendent in the movies

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Mariola MARCZAK – The Image that Refers to the Invisible: On Metaphysical Cinema at the Turn of the 21st Century

The article deals with world cinema manifesting a metaphysical attitude. According to modern Polish philosopher Barbara Skarga, metaphysical thinking denotes thinking without limits. This kind of thinking provokes creative, inspiring

questions, in particular the question «why?» On the other hand, a metaphysical approach means investigating things comprehensively and seeing problems in their entirety.

Occasionally, cinema is used as a means of addressing metaphysical questions, and, owing to the popularity of the audio-visual medium and its comprehensive language of images, it attracts numerous adherents to creative philosophical thinking. Moreover, metaphysical art may express an attempt to conquer the «fear of non-existence.»

However, within the last two decades there have been few films only that evoked transcendence in a specific way. Among them are Kim Ki-duk's *Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter... and Spring* (2003) and Pavel Lungin's *The Island* (2006). Nevertheless, in the case of numerous films, certain motifs can be interpreted as suggesting the existence of another dimension of the world and of the human life. This kind of cinema characteristically describes such essential human experiences as love, suffering, evil and death, developing a metaphysical reflection against them.

Each section of the article is devoted to the presentation of films focused on a specific topic, and in each case the analysis of the film structure reveals the aesthetic means or strategies employed in its creation. Thus Nanni Moretti's *The Son's Room* (2001) can be seen as representing the metaphysic of death, while Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) and Marion Hänsel's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1995) manifest the metaphysic of love. Nuri Bilge Ceylan is considered by the author as the director representing most typically this trend in modern cinema and as an heir to the great Andrei Tarkovsky. While numerous films situated on the borderline of the phenomenon of metaphysical cinema have been made for the last twenty years, only very few of them can be considered as typical of this kind of film work. Most directors use realistic conventions to characterize the basic condition of human existence, but their reflection usually stops at the edge of the experience of the transcendent. In other cases, filmmakers build up an allegory or a parable involving metaphysical questions or revealing the transcendent origins of experiences such as love, suffering, evil or death. Also the particular aesthetic values of the images used in a given film can become a means of invoking the transcendent reality.

The author concludes by pointing that nowadays the center of metaphysical reflection in film has moved to less popular, Eastern cinematographies, so far seen as peripheral. On the other hand, despite a growing need for this type of discourse in film, the language in which metaphysical reflection is formulated, tends to be simplified and less complex, the directors willingly making recourse to genre conventions. This phenomenon is conditioned by the lack of sophistication of modern film audiences.

Keywords: metaphysical cinema, metaphysic of death in film, metaphysic of love in film, the transcendent element in film

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Piotr KLETOWSKI – To Get a Glimpse of What Is Covered Up: The Cinema of the Far East as a Special Intellectual and Aesthetic Phenomenon in World Cinematography

The article comprises a brief analysis of the ideological and formal determinants of the cinema of the Far East, represented by Chinese, Hong-Kong, Japanese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Vietnamese filmmakers.

Firstly, the author explores the relation between Western and Asian cinema in order to demonstrate to which extent Asian cinema adapts Western cinematic patterns and to which extent it creates its separate cinematographic forms.

He continues by investigating a connected problem, namely that of the way the ideological determinants of the culture of the Far East are reflected in the cinematic output of this region. The analysis focuses on the crucial significance of the confrontation of the Confucianist idea (subordinating the individual to the society) with the Buddhist ones (which aim at the emancipation of the individual). The clash between the two attitudes results in a revolt, which constitutes the major theme of the film art of the Far East region.

The third problem analysed is that of the film form: the author investigates whether the cinematographies of the Far East can be considered as formally independent. He concludes by pointing out that the independence of Asiatic cinematographies can be seen in their immersion in the original culture of the nations they represent (as it is manifested in such art forms as painting and theatre).

The core of the article is the analysis of Chinese culture and cinema, which “radiate” into the other cinematographies of the region and stimulate their development.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: cinema of the Far East, Asian culture as reflected in films, film and philosophy

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Waldemar FRĄC – Death Devoid of Essence: The Conclusion to the Iwaszkiewicz-Wajda Triptych

The article comprises an attempt to follow the main idea underlying Andrzej Wajda's film adaptations of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's short stories *Brzezina* (film *The Birch Wood*, 1971), *Panny z Wilka* (film *The Maids of Wilko*, 1979) and *Tatarak* (film *Sweet Rush*, 2009). The teleology of these artistic creations manifests a paradoxical sense of the experience of death, which combines three aspects into a oneness, namely, unexpectedness, solitude and fear.

The last of the adaptations in question, namely, *Tatarak*, evokes above all the first sense of death, doing so on the three levels of the film's innovative plot structure, namely, the reality plane, the autothematic motif and the plane of fiction.

Subject to particular analysis are the images in *Tatarak* which were inspired by specific paintings and used by the director in Krystyna Janda's monologue on death.

Another significant element in the text is reflection on the medium of cinema itself, which is an art that embodies the phenomenon of existential paradox: the presence of the absence. This particular nature of the medium of cinema was explored already by early film studies.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: film adaptations of literary works, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Andrzej Wajda, the motif of death in film, reference to painting in film

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Fr. Andrzej LUTER – The Pursuit of Transcendence, as manifested by the Polish Cinema of the 21st Century

The author discusses the phenomenon of works of the directors representing independent cinema in Poland and focuses on the output of Radosław Markiewicz and Artur Pilarczyk. Both of them raise issues concerning the basic inescapable spiritual and existential choices, and in doing so they demonstrate their attitudes of benevolence and kindness towards the human being. The main characteristic of their films is the mystery of transcendence that informs them. Markiewicz's *Metanoia* (2005) is a deeply intimate religious meditation. The main character, Jozue, a religious, wants to sink into solitude and to obliterate his ego in his continuous quest for God. However, his monastic life does not provide him with a sense of conversion. Neither community prayers, nor his individual contemplation of the Word of God or self-mortification, such as

self-flagellation, lead him to the conviction that he has found the Most High. The main character in the movie by Markiewicz conceives of death, which is his aim, as an act that is one with suffering. He wants to follow Christ, which means to accept human nature, corporality, sexuality, mortality, pain, life among other human beings and a relation to the world.

The religious reality of *Metanoia* has nothing in common with religiosity, rather, it denotes the reality of “here and now” no one can evade: it has either to be freely rejected or accepted, with all the consequences.

The author points to a certain similarity between Markiewicz’s *Metanoia* and Pavel Lungin’s *Island* (2006). Markiewicz demonstrates faith in God, which, however, is by no means an easy faith. He has a sensibility to the transcendence and confirms it in his film *Scrap* (*Złom*, 2002), which is a moving study about the victory of humanity and human dignity even in the most difficult situations.

Artur Pilarczyk, the second director whose output is considered in the article, has made a movie about a seminarian, or, to be more precise, about a vocation. Entitled *Teraz i zawsze* (“Now and Forever,” 2008), this is a film about the doubts experienced by a man of faith. “Doubts are the greatest gift; without them our faith would be dead,” says an old Cistercian monk to the young seminarian pondering the sense of the choice he has made.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: independent Polish cinema, Radosław Markiewicz, Artur Pilarczyk, pursuit of transcendence in the movies

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Maciej NOWAK – Filming Jazz: Between the Document and the Masterpiece

The author explores the ways of bringing out music by filming it, and focuses on the question of how a stream of moving images is capable of rendering music. He develops the idea that a successful attempt at jazz filming must take into account the phenomenon of improvisation which lies at the foundation of jazz.

Following the French Music critic Thierry Lepin, the author holds that the most important rule of making a film about music is that the filmmaker should grasp the spontaneity of gestures and the body movements of the players. In the case of filming jazz, the film serves to assist the music. One watches the film in order to hear the music better. Therefore jazz filming must not be reduced to simple recording of an artistic event.

The goal of jazz filming is not to provide a documentary or a report on an event. Rather, the goal lies in this case in recording music so as to ultimately render its specificity and evoke the qualities proper to it. Such an effect is usually achieved in the case of a film masterpiece.

The essay comprises some interpretations of films on jazz, among them *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1960) and *Miles Electric. A Different Kind of Blue* (2004).

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: history of jazz, improvisation, multimedia poetics, film on art, history of film, 20th century art and culture, aesthetics of the media.

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Maria KURPIK – Polish Film Poster

Starting with the first motion pictures, films have always been accompanied by posters distributed together with them and used to advertise them. Thus the art of film and the art of poster have coexisted, drawing on each other. Initially, there were no captions in the posters, which were designed so as to make it possible to add anytime the information about the place and the hours of the showing.

The interwar period was the age of jazz, the time of avant-garde experiment in art and the age of scientific and artistic discoveries. Dynamic compositions became popular in film posters as a way of expressing things such as the rhythm of the dance or the momentum of the machine. Photographic experiments of the 1930's inspired the transformation of flat images into three-dimensional representations. Photography provided clues how to accomplish immediacy of the effect and how to use a changing chiaroscuro effects. Graphic designers would apply innovative techniques juxtaposing spatial elements and flat ones. In order to evoke even deeper astonishment of the viewers, designers used still another technique, namely, photo montage. However, the design of film posters was affected not only by photography, but also by various art trends developing at the time.

Only very few Polish film posters from the period of the second world war have been preserved. However, already in 1948, Henryk Tomaszewski received Five Golds Medals at the International Poster Exhibition in Vienna (Austria). It was then that the first articles about the Polish Poster Art appeared in international journals. The picturesque, metaphoric images manifesting a uniquely concise form were the beginning of the age of the Polish School of Poster. This name is used today to denote individual, humorous and intelligent works of poster art.

The Polish film poster was subject to various transformations: starting with the Polish School, through the color posters of the 1970's, known for political allusions they expressed, to the openly political posters of the early 1980's.

After 1989, the freedom of the market was conducive to the commercialization of cinema. Paradoxically though, the number of commissioned Polish film posters tended to diminish, because together with the films imported to Poland, obligatory advertisement packs were supplied, including film posters. This, however, does not mean that Polish film posters no longer exist. New ones can be seen in the streets, and, slowly, the Polish artistic film poster is being revitalized.

An interesting phenomenon is that of posters appearing on the Internet. On many websites created for the purpose of art presentation and on many social portals, both old and new film posters can be seen, and sometimes they are available only on the net.

To sum up, one can say that the art of Polish film poster has reflected all the trends, fashions or world tendencies in that art. Yet none of those influences was decisive to the extent of eliminating the specifically Polish thinking about the way of conveying the message of a poster or the distinct, individual approach to its subject. Regardless of the time of their creation, Polish film posters have always been an unrepeatable phenomenon, which is currently being reborn.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: Polish film poster, Henryk Tomaszewski, political poster

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Joanna WOJNICKA – On the Ruins of Illusion: An Essay on the Russian Cinema of the Last Two Decades

The article undertakes a review of contemporary Russian cinema and discusses the main phenomena concerning Russian films since 1990, that is since the political breakthrough in Russia. The author focuses on the most interesting Russian films of that period, some of which include attempts at an examination of the historical past (or, alternatively, completely abandon any examination of that kind). Other movies discussed in the article (in particular those by Nikita Mikhalkov) refer to the classical ideas and concepts of the role of Russia in the world. Still others reveal new artistic personalities (such as Aleksey Balabanov and Pavel Lungin) in modern Russian cinema. A major part of the text includes an analysis of Andrei Zvyagintsev's films (*The Return*, 2003, and *The Banishment*, 2007). Almost all the commentators of his work have pointed to the reference he makes to Andrei Tarkovsky's films, as well as to its being a continuation of the religious tradition deeply grounded in Russian culture. While probing these elements in the films by Zvyagintsev, the author uses the interpretational key that uncovers a unique transposition of the motifs of the father

and fatherhood (also in their sacred dimension), only infrequently used in contemporary world cinema.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: Russian cinema since 1990, religious elements in Russian films, Andrei Zvyagintsev

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Mateusz WERNER – The Past Projected on the Screen

The first part of the article focuses on the controversies around the concept of a «policy» of presenting history in films, the concept itself being traditionally associated in Poland with the authoritarian control over the domain of culture. Firstly, a brief outline of such a policy, as it is currently employed in the two different political systems of Russia and Germany, is presented with a focus on the audiovisual means of social communication. This is followed with a tentative analysis of the suitability of the medium of film for communicating the message that expresses a particular understanding of the historical events in some way crucial to the political legitimacy of the state.

The second part of the article includes a discussion of the peripeteias of the Polish cinema that has attempted accounting with the past and raising history related topics. In the course of its development, from 1989 onwards, this trend in Polish cinema was first enthusiastically received as revealing historical facts and making vindications. Then, in the 1990's, when historical films seemed outdated, it experienced stagnation only to produce an new wave of historical films in the latest years.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: Polish cinema after 1989, films accounting with the past, policies of presenting history in films

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Marcin ADAMCZAK – 21st Century Hollywood Cinema, as seen in the Light of Contemporary Film Studies

The author presents a brief description of Hollywood cinema at the turn of the 21st century, against the background of broader transformations of the audio-visual culture of this period. The article extensively refers to works of English and American scholars conducting their research in film studies, among them Toby Miller, Aida Hozic, Janet Wasko, Jon Lewis and Thomas Elsaesser. All of them stress the impact of the economic factors and explore the interdependence of the spheres of economy and culture, as manifested in contemporary cinema. The focus of the article is the economics of movie production in Hollywood, as well as the distribution and circulation of its motion pictures, since it is these two aspects of film-making that appear crucial to the description of the Hollywood cinema of the 21st century.

In the course of the text, the author analyzes the most significant processes stimulated by globalization which have contributed to the transformation of the film culture of the latest decades. Their impact is seen in the film budgets rising considerably, in the appearance of a range of new media, in the proliferation of multiplex cinemas, in the incorporation of most Hollywood studios in conglomerate structures, and, last but not least, in the progressing commercialization of cinema. Thus the currently witnessed phenomena can be described as pointing to a transformation of the social function of cinema and to the change of its place on the «cultural map.» To use the term coined by an American researcher, what we are currently witnessing is “the end of cinema as we know it.”

A separate question considered in the text is that of the hegemony of Hollywood productions in world cinemas, the curious situation in which slogans about globalization become materialized in the domain of film and, simultaneously, the productions of the «factory of dreams» are no longer perceived as overseas cinema or a distant phenomenon: rather, they are seen as a «naturalized» part of a given national film industry and, as such, are treated as «our cinema» to no lesser extent than the productions of the local cinematography.

Translated by Dorota Chabrajska

Keywords: contemporary films studies, Hollywood cinema of the 21st century, economics of movie production, the social function of cinema, commercialization of film industry

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Jerzy PŁAŻEWSKI – To Recover the Best Repertory for Polish Cinemas

The author discusses the changes that have taken place in the selection of films shown in Polish cinemas since the 1960's up to the present moment. Much as it may appear impossible, it was primarily film critics who had a decisive influence on the shape of the repertory of Polish cinemas in the communist period. Despite various obstructions and the ideological censorship most prize-winning films at the most important international film festivals were shown in Poland, giving Polish cinema goers open access to the best movies produced in the world (in fact only very few films were actually banned on political or moral grounds). The repertory offered by Polish cinemas was so attractive at that time that film critics from other socialist states would come to Poland to see the leading film productions of world cinema. As a result, a discerning and demanding film audience was shaped in Poland. The viewers expected to see the best movies produced in the world, which undoubtedly contributed to the raising of quality level of Polish movies and to the appearance of the so-called Polish Film School and the «moral anxiety cinema.»

This situation dramatically changed after the 1989 breakthrough, which was preceded by the cultural collapse caused by the martial law declared by the communist government in December 1981. During the period of martial law many links with world culture were broken and they were not retrieved even after 1989. Instead, Polish cinemas welcomed an influx of predominantly American movies which included splendid works of film art as well as mediocre films and examples of pure kitsch. Only very few prize winning films at the Cannes Film Festival, ones representing national film industries of Europe, found their way to Polish cinemas.

The author goes on to enumerate important movies never shown in the cinemas in Poland, among them films by Eric Rohmer, Alain Resnais, Claude Chabrol, Bertarnd Tavernier, Claude Miller, André Techiné, Christian Carion, Rachid Bouchareb, Michelangelo Antonioni, Nanni Moretti, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Roberto Benigni and Pupi Avati. Briefly discussed are also movies by Russian, German, British, Canadian, Turkish, Greek, Belgian, Portuguese, and Scandinavian directors, works for various reasons considered as important to world cinema, which, however, never made their way to Poland. Even some important Hollywood productions were missing from the repertory of Polish cinemas, let alone independent American movies or films made in Asia and Latin America. As a result, Polish cinema-goers are simply cut off from a large part of world film culture.

The remedy for this situation is seen by the author in the new legal regulations governing the distribution of foreign films in Poland and in introducing state subsidies for those film distributors who decide to circulate independent, non-commercial movies, also older ones, including Polish and foreign productions.

Summarized by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: film repertory, film festivals, national film industries, independent cinema, legal regulations concerning film distribution

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“Ill with Poland.” Fr. Andrzej LUTER Talks to Andrzej WAJDA

The focus of the interview with Andrzej Wajda, eminent Polish film director, is his films depicting the most dramatic moments of Polish history. Jerzy Andrzejewski, great Polish writer who collaborated with Wajda in the Polish Film School period, once observed that the director is «ill with Poland.» This diagnosis, however, seems ambiguous: on the one hand, it denotes a fascination with the Polish national character, while on the other, it suggests a deep criticism of the Polish vices. Andrzej Wajda says: “Being ill with something, one has not chosen the illness, it is rather the illness that has chosen one. And if this particular illness, the «illness with Poland,» has chosen me, it is probably because I am vulnerable to it.” Wajda’s «vulnerability» to the «illness with Poland» was, at least in part, a consequence of his family background and his biography: He was born to a deeply patriotic, military family. Wajda’s father, former member of Józef Piłsudski’s Legions, was murdered in Katyń, and his mother was endlessly waiting for her husband to return, unaware of his fate. Wajda tried painting, but he became accomplished as a man of cinema. In his films from the period of the Polish Film School, he would speak about the ordeal his generation experienced during the second world war. Neither he, nor his colleagues questioned the great sacrifice and heroism of the Polish underground army, but it was rather individual human dramas that they stressed in their films, pointing to the absurdity of that enormous suffering. For instance, as the tragic events of the Warsaw Uprising were gradually being revealed, the rebellious directors of the Polish Film School became increasingly convinced that staging the Uprising had been a crime. The main themes they undertook included the enormous scope of sacrifice suffered during the Uprising, as well as its utmost absurdity and failure in every respect. This thinking is evident already in Wajda’s film *Kanal* (1957), but also in his *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), movies in which he would unmask heroism. Wajda was aware that victim can easily turn into executioner, which was expressed most clearly in his *Landscape after Battle* (1970), based on prose by Tadeusz Borowski.

In the interview, Wajda comments on his movie *Ashes* (1965), based on a novel by Stefan Żeromski, in which he questioned Polish national myths and abolished mental stereotypes. Asked whether he was aware that the film in question would spark off a nationwide debate (one can say that the movie and the arguments around it foreshadowed the events of March 1968 in Poland), Wajda says: “The so-called Moczar’s men, or national communists, needed an enemy. I was being attacked fiercely, in a demagogical way: How can one be showing the tragedy of Santo Domingo? How can one be showing Polish soldiers raping Spanish women or executing the insurgents in Madrid? But I was not filming Sienkiewicz, I was filming Żeromski, and I showed the world he had described, of which I had a full awareness.” In his 1973 adaptation of

Stanisław Wyspiański's play *The Wedding*, Wajda in turn measured himself against the cruel vision of «national weakness.»

Another subject discussed in the interview is that of the «moral anxiety» cinema of the 1970's. The films representing that trend demonstrate the moral decay of the «Gierek age,» which can be seen most evidently in Wajda's *Without Anesthesia* (also called *Rough Treatment*) of 1978. It was also during that time that Wajda made his *Man of Marble* (1977), the film in which he attempted to settle down the account with the Stalinist period in Poland.

In the course of the interview, Wajda talks also about his film adaptations of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's short stories. Owing to those movies, he was able to «rest» from political themes and immerse in the world of the existential experiences of a human individual. *The Maids of Wilko* (1979) is a masterpiece about the passing of life.

A *post mortem* of the Polish Film School is *Katyń* (2007), the movie Wajda could not make in the communist Poland due to political censorship and which he successfully completed in the independent Poland. The film is an elegy, marked by the director's personal attitude, since his father was among those killed in that place of mass execution of Polish soldiers during the second world war.

Wajda's 1999 adaptation of Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* is, as he says, a story about the nostalgia for Poland, experienced in the face of the fact that Poles were themselves to blame for the loss of their homeland.

In the concluding part of the interview, Wajda expresses his skepticism about the future: "My difficulty is that I feel alone now. For a substantial part of my life I was working with people who wrote stories on the subjects on which I wanted to make movies. It meant that the cinema was part of a larger whole. Today, cinema has alienated itself from the world, while contemporary literature is confined to providing descriptions of itself. And this is a great problem of mine: If I want to explore themes relating to the past, it turns out I have no allies: there are no screenwriters who will take up such subjects. And when I think about the present times, these young people turn out to see the reality in a different way from the one in which I perceive it."

Yet the director does not lose hopes of making another movie that will confirm his incurable «illness.»

Translated by Dorota Chabrajska

Keywords: Andrzej Wajda, Polish Film School, 20th century Polish history in film

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Piotr WOJCIECHOWSKI – The Lost Borderlands – the Saved Borderlands

The essay starts with a reference to the quotation: "...as if a hidden frontier ran from me to others," which is a line from Karol Wojtyła's poem *Thinking My Country* and part of the motto to the present text. The stylistic figure it embraces includes a paradox. In the course of the reflections, the author demonstrates that the paradox in question simultaneously offers a proposal of how to conceive of the homeland in terms of community and culture. The conception of homeland can become even deeper once homeland is analyzed with reference to the fundamental anthropological functions of culture.

The author points to the fact that the myth of the Borderlands is part of the traditional Polish thinking about the homeland, and holds that this thinking is prone to error and misconception, unless the emotional identification with the «lost» Borderlands is accompanied by a discovery of the still «saved» Borderlands. Currently, this region of Poland is economically underdeveloped and culturally underprivileged, although its spiritual and material potential is unique and enormous.

In the course of the text, the author shares with the readers some experiences concerning his participation in the promotion of a bicycle trail and country tourism along the eastern border of Poland. In order to implement this project, Poland has received a substantial subsidy from the European Union. However, this subsidy may be squandered due to negligence, since the local human capital of the region has not been released. This question is discussed in the concluding part of the essay, where the author describes his impressions from his stay in the villages of Dołohobyczów and Hrebenne in the autumn of 2009.

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Tadeusz MICZKA – The «Struggle» of Polish Film Scholars with the Human Body: Review of *Ciało i seksualność w kinie polskim* [The Body and Sexuality in Polish Cinema], ed. S. Jagielski and A. Morstin-Popławska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2009

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Agnieszka ŻUK – Visconti and Others: Portraits of the Makers of the European Cinema: Review of *Autorzy kina europejskiego* [The Authors of the European Cinema], ed. A. Helman and A. Pitrus, Rabid, Kraków 2009

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Dorota CHABRAJSKA – Craftsmanship or Art? Review of B. Wildstein's *Śmieszna dwuznaczność świata, który oszalał* [Funny Ambiguity of the World That Has Gone Mad], Fronda, Warszawa 2009

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Małgorzata KITOWSKA-ŁYSIAK – Against the Flow: Review of W. Skrodzki's *Wizjonerzy i mistrzowie* [Visionaries and Masters], Towarzystwo „Więź”, Warszawa 2009

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Edward FERENC – To Open Oneself Up to the Mystical Aura: Review of L. Mądzik's *Teatr, scenografia, warsztaty, fotografia, plakat. Theatre, Stage Design, Workshop, Photography, Poster*, Jedność, Kielce 2008)

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Proposals of the *Ethos* (P. Skrzypczak, *Aktor i jego postać ekranowa* [The Actor and His Screen Character], Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika; M. Szydłowska, *Między Broadwayem a Hollywood. Szkice o artystach z Polski w Stanach Zjednoczonych* [Between Broadway and Hollywood. Sketches about Polish Ar-

tists in the United States], Rabid; Fr. J. Sochoń, *Intencje codzienne* [Everyday Intentions], Podkarpacki Instytut Książki i Marketingu)

Stephan KAMPOWSKI – Towards Christ: *Redemptor hominis*, Thirty Years Later. The Relevance of a Way to the Human Being: Report on an international congress held on the 30th anniversary of the Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis*, Rome, 16-17 Oct. 2009; trans. D. Chabrajska)

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Agnieszka LEKKA-KOWALIK – Emotions and Metaphysics (report on the 12th International Symposium on Modern Metaphysics in the series “Tasks of Metaphysics,” KUL, Lublin, 10 Dec. 2009)

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Karolina ZYCHOWICZ – The Sphere as a Mysterious Symbol of Human Existence: On Jiménez Deredia’s Exhibition “Deridia: The Genesis and the Symbol” (Rome, 23 June–30 Nov. 2009)

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Marek KOTYŃSKI, CSSR – The Image of John Paul II, as seen in Feature Films

From the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II became a focus of interest to the mass media, in particular to film makers, who aimed to fathom the extraordinary phenomenon of that man. Firstly and most importantly, they were interested in the personality of Karol Wojtyła. In order to portray it adequately, film directors would usually present his life against its historical background, showing the culture and religious tradition of Poland. They would

stress his deep patriotism and his attachment to the values of family and friendship. They also showed Wojtyła's amazing intelligence, his openness to the pursuit of truth, as well as his wisdom in protecting the truly human culture, in which he perceived the source of hope and charity.

Among of the strongest points of the film presentations of Wojtyła's way through life, are attempts at grasping the process of his accomplishing emotional maturity. Most film makers do not wish to show John Paul II as a person with already crystallized views or as one adopting uncompromising attitudes, they rather tend to portray a person with an open mind, one who is seeking and growing. This effect is accomplished through revealing Wojtyła's inner perplexities and the moral dilemmas he faced, as well as the radical questions he posed and the difficult choices he made at different times of his life.

The films in question also show the Pope's courage in facing the drama of existence, the deepest and impenetrable Mystery. He paid for that courage with deep suffering and with his own "dark night," the state of the soul about which great mystics tell us. All of it, accepted and lived through with confidence in God, became Wojtyła's difficult experience of faith, yet one transforming his existence, shaping his personal identity, and ultimately resulting in his deeper understanding of the inner logic of life.

In the course of the article, the author argues that the films that show the outstanding and multidimensional personality of John Paul II can be seen as reflecting the mentality of their makers, and, more broadly, the mentality of modern man as such. They in a way point to the mystery of the human being and they are a «mirror» in which one can discern the extraordinary potentialities inherent in the human personality and in the human soul: in a way, they «reveal» man to himself.

Translated by *Dorota Chabrajska*

Keywords: film images of John Paul II, the religious film, John Paul II and the mass media

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