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THE PLAY OF PLAYS IN POSTMODERN CINEMA

The postmodern helpless acceptance of chaos surrounding the world makes me think about works by Francis Ponge, a French poet, who was signed with the existential mark very strongly. He tried to make a precise description of objects in his prose poems, following in this case Ludwig Wittgenstein's advice.¹ But he was never satisfied with the result of his work which he used to express in such reflections: "To describe a body means to say little about a man himself. [...] Jauntiness. A man hardly anything knows about his body, he has never seen his entrails, he rarely sees his blood. [...] Nature makes him only see the suburbs of his body. [...] He can only guess himself by analogy while watching his neighbours. But his own body will be never experienced. Nothing will be more strange than his body. [...] Nothing strikes (and surprises) so much as this human feature; he lives quietly in the heart of a mystery, in an ideal unacquaintance with something touching him most intensely and deep. [...] A man is a subject difficult to spin [...]. The greatest difficulty is to find the distance, adaptation and adjustment of a view. A man is a hard object to be taken under a lens. What would a tree do to express the nature of trees? It would make leaves, but this wouldn't tell us much. Haven't we put ourselves in a similar situation?"² Well, I would like to answer this difficult and alarming question as sensibly as I only can.

¹ Compare: "All the explanation must disappear and should be displaced by description". L. Wittgenstein: *Dociekania filozoficzne (Philosophical Investigations)* In: *Filozofia współczesna (Contemporary Philosophy)*. Vol. 2. Ed. Z. Kuderowicz. Warszawa, WP, 1983, p. 29.

² F. Ponge: *Ze wstępnych notatek do człowieka (The Initial Remarks on a Man)*. In: *Osoby (People)*. Ed. M. Janion and S. Rosiek. Gdańsk, Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1984, p. 75-77.

But whenever I try to do this, I am made think about something again, this time about Jacques Derrida's dissertation on Francis Ponge.³ It is a debate on one of the philosopher's texts which became the final end of structuralism (as he thinks anyway).

Derrida, taking up the problem the poet was most interested in, did this very polemically, and turned the situation completely up: "its name, shall I say, is Francis Ponge", and he used to write and "mimed mimesis" and "making hypothesis more strange, but more probable as well" on sentences changing their meanings "because of the difference of 'a today', and meaning the statement about the creator himself. He defined three modalities of his signature. The first one he called "the signature" presenting his own name ("here it is my name, I call myself, myself as I am called, so I do it in the name of mine"), so certifying the one who writes. The second modality - "(an obscure metaphor of the first one) means all the idiomatical traits left in a work by the one who signs it unconsciously or purposely" - this is often called the style. And the last one is the "sign of the sign, the selfreflection overlapping itself" and refers to the overlapping of the author's self description and putting his name into the action for instance. According to Derrida these three modalities are structurally separatable. But merging a "self name" with a "text trunk" one makes of it a thing which loses its personality and a "title to the text". "It is something necessary for the signature to remain and disappear, to remain to disappear, to disappear in order to remain. It is necessary - and this is important only. It is necessary for it to remain ready for disappearance, the double simultaneous requirement, the double demand repugnant to itself, the double duty [...], a stiffening duplicate [...]". It goes like that since the thing is more important than the subject, it can "give orders", since "it has no duties over" the man, and the man can only sign it, so writing himself down into it he can participate in the text, so in an event which "never lasts to its end", etc. In other words, this is not Francis Ponge who talks by his text, but the text speaks Francis Ponge⁴ who can only provisionally come closer to the subject (in this case: the body-man) which he is interested in.

³ J. Derrida: *Signsponge*. Translated by R. Rand. New York, Columbia University Press, 1984. All the above quotations, changed a bit, comes from this edition of the book.

⁴ It was also pointed except philosophers by Sigmunt Freud who was followed by Jacques Lacan, the author of the works having some influence on postmodern thinkers who quoted his definition of subject very often: "I think where I am not, so I am where I do not think". Compare H. Lang: *Die psychoanalytische Theorie Jacques Lacans*. "Die Psychologie des 20 Jahrhunderts". 1980, Bd. 10, p. 717-727.

In *Glas* Derrida showed in two parallel columns quotations from *Principles of the Philosophy of Law* by Hegel and from *Journal du voleur* by Genet making this way a set of associations or rather puns. The author treated the language as oppositions: Consciousness-subconsciousness, reason-result or man-woman etc., constructing the "text" of world existence. But as the being is unknowable - it is not the subject who uses the language, but otherwise: The oppositions mentioned above can create themselves loosely as they only reflect preferences of a man sunk in entropy, so: Being conscious of his helplessness. The hierarchy of oppositions (read: system of values) is always artificial and that is why the basic rule human existence is based on, becomes a "free play".⁵ Every man - and all the more an artist or a critic ready for quest - takes up an unrestricted game with the language. And again Derridian conception of the language influencing philosophers and artists in great respect being also the ground of postmodern thinking, makes me think of something again - this time: About Greenaway's films.

Here in *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) three women appear: A grandmother, a daughter and a granddaughter; their name is Cissie Colpitt and they drown their husbands in a bath-tub, swimming-pool and sea. Their husbands have their eccentricities: One of them, for instance, completed in his room a hundred (exactly: a hundred) objects whose names begin with 's'. The question: Why do the wives drown their husbands and they have their eccentricities? - is formulated in a wrong way. Everyone who knows other pictures by Greenaway knows that it is impossible to ask for example, why in *The Draughtman's Contract* (1982), twelve pictures appear, or why in *Intervals* (1969) each scene lasts 13 seconds or why in *The Falls* (1980), in a fictional document, 92 figures who survived in an ecological disaster appear, and all their names begin with *Falls*. The question is that Greenaway's film language simply reflects his cognitive preferences, which undoubtedly are of a play nature. The English artist obstinately tries to convince us that the structure of a picture precedes a plot and a frame comes before the action. He tries to turn up the traditional systems of values but he does this on the authority of one particular rule. For him all the rules turning logical thinking are the point of departure for running an open play with reality and language for which a watcher also is invited.

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See J. Derrida: *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1967. This conception of world (and language) existence was attaced several times by many researches, for instance by R. Wellek: *Czy kres literaturoznawstwa? (The End of Theory of Literature?)* "Pamiętnik Literacki" 1986, vol. 2, p. 319-330.

While I am thinking about Greenaway's cinema, I must often think about films by David Lynch, where the heroes never "find themselves on the right place" (according to the natural and logical determinants). Figures from *Twin Peaks* play different "life games" with one another, which are only accidentally connected with the murder of a young erotomaniac girl, as the watchers are forced to have wrong suspicions, or rather wrong "peeps".

The fear I feel while watching Lynch's pictures also accompanies me when I watch the film by Martin Scorsese, *After Hours* (1982), as each scene begins with a long-time recording of an element. As a result - watching the screen I can see an ordinary bank clerk involved in several strange, not connected with one another intrigues, when he walks in the night along Soho. But first of all I can see the details being set, I notice the objects become abnormal. And people also behave in an abnormal manner. So, everything presented on the screen seems to be dark at last. "The director makes trails", Marek Nalikowski defines such illustration this way, "he shows them in a way visible for everyone, and if they are visible - he throws them away and takes away their sense. [...] But the question appears: Do we touch an accident in *After Hours*, or does the accident exist at all? In this case Scorsese's picture renew an old dispute between determinism and indeterminism. The question is in the problem of interpreting phenomena. None of the accidents is improbable enough not to happen and their accumulation seems to be absurd. [...] Scorsese's anti-Cartesian revolt is partial: He does not assume *a priori* the absurdity of the world but its mysteriousness. [...] The world shown by Scorsese does not terrify - the director's irony is visible well enough. Scorsese made a realistic film about New York in his specific manner: His vision in its accumulation of strange people types and other uncommonnesses can be a synthesis of this unique city. The director shows it on a planche of a mystery game conventionally called Soho; its rules are unknown, but one can assume them intuitively. It cannot be won [My emphasis - T. M.], but the defeat is also problematic. It contains, so to say, in the pure fact of taking part in this game, which does not depend on us at all".⁶

Of course, Martin Scorsese's film makes me think about other screen pictures, for instance about *Untouchables* (1987) by Brian De Palma and Jonathan Demme's *Something Wild* (1987); but this stream of associa-

⁶ M. Nalikowski: "Po godzinach" - narodziny filmowego dadaizmu? ("*After Hours*" - *The Birth of Film Dada?*) "Kino" 1988, No 9, p. 40-42.

tions must be stopped, as it also does not illustrate in full respect the "rules" of a *free* play which I try to run with the reader, taking as a start the "postmodern structure" of thinking (the world which is probably most often fought by Derrida and the followers of his philosophy).

This sort of play has some typical features which unfortunately are not similar to one another to the same degree in each play; they are rather differences of quality. The free play is written deeply into human experience, and it is - according to Henri Bergson, Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard - a particular mixture of feelings, since a man experiences everything in mixture.

The postmodern play has not much to do with the obsession of clear thinking. It is testified by logic. Ludwig Wittgenstein explains to his readers the essence of language play by the particular enumeration of examples: "Look at something we call 'games' one day. The point is in games like chess, cards, football, sport games, etc. What is common for all of them? - But don't say: 'They must have something common, otherwise they wouldn't be called *games*' - just look if they have anything common. - If you look at them attentively, you will not see anything common for them, however, you will notice similarities and relationships - and what is more: A large number of them. So, as it has just been said: Don't think, but look! For instance, look at games like chess with all their similarities. Then go to cards: You will find here several equivalents of the set before, but at the same time some common features disappear and others emerge. Next, when we proceed to football, several common features are still the same, but some of them are lost. - Is every game an 'entertainment'? Compare chess with draughts. Or maybe: Everywhere there is a winner and a loser and competition? Try to think about solitaire. While playing ball games there is a winner and a loser. But when a child pitches a ball against the wall and catches it again, it is nothing like that. Look at the role efficiency and luck play. And how different is the performance in chess and in tennis. Then think about games like dance pageants: There is an element of entertainment, but how many other features have disappeared? This way we could go through a number of other games watching how similarities appear and disappear. And the result of these considerations sounds like that: We can see a complicated net of similarities; similarities on a large and small scale overlapping and crossing one another.

[...] I cannot characterize these similarities better than calling them 'familiar relationships', as particular similarities of family members interlock and cross one another just this way: The stature, features, eyes col-

our, walk, temperament, etc., etc. – I will also say: 'plays make a family'".⁷ From this probably too long (but necessary for our considerations) quotation one conclusion comes: The most important feature of a game (play) is its relationship with other games (plays); this is what makes it in a wide respect a free play and opens an endless area of differences and similarities, makes an occasion for constructing the play of plays. On this base we can easily come to the conviction, that pictures by Greenaway, Lynch and Scorsese and also many others: For instance *The Wall* by Allan Parker, *Film* by Samuel Beckett,⁸ *Manhattan* by Woody Allen – belong to the same family.

Another typical feature of the free play is connected with a colossal prejudice of all *postscientists* against logocentrism and anthropocentrism. If nothing can be named, told, seen or *really* understood, the people who play have at their disposal only such signs as symbols, metaphors, metonymies, puns, puzzles, so all the indefinablenesses and ambiguities. Not accidentally do postmodern researches analyse just symbols, metaphors and metonymies, allowing themselves to play loosely on words, making metaphors of their own. I will not discuss this sort of works in this essay, as they are widely known.⁹ I would like to pay attention only to the main idea of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's

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Quotation from *Contemporary Philosophy...*, Vol. 2, p. 28-29.

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See S. Beckett: *Film*. "Literatura na Świecie" 1975, No. 5. Beckett's work can be a sort of screen illustration for George Berkeley's philosophical thesis (*esse = percipi* – "to exist" means "to be seen"), which splendidly corresponds with postmodern thinking – even if it seems to be strange. The director shows a "sensational play of views" on the screen: the actor-object (OB) avoids the eye (EYE), so the view of a camera lens. For example: when OB is in a room, and the EYE "stands" behind him, the watcher sees the interior of the room with OB "eyes", so he experiences the perception of perception. Of course, OB does not want to be perceived by anyone or anything else, that is why he eliminates other "sources of view" (for example, he covers the windows and the mirror up); but when the action connected with the exchange of views is over, the frightened face of OB, who becomes conscious that avoiding someone else's perception he perceives himself from the inside is left on the screen. Beckett's *Film* is also quoted by E. Wilde, who discusses an excellent book by G. Deleuze *Cinéma 1. L'image-mouvement*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit 1983.

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See for instance *Symbol e i symbolika (Symbols and symbolism)*. Ed. introduction by M. Głowiński. Warszawa, "Czytelnik", 1990; P. Ricoeur: *Metafora i symbol (Metaphor and Symbol)* "Literatura na Świecie" 1988, No. 8-9, p. 233-254 and G. Lakoff, M. Johnson: *Metafora w naszym życiu (Metaphors in Our Life)*. Warszawa, PIW, 1988. On the "symbols reality" at Lacans' see H. Lang: *Die psychoanalytische Theorie Jacques Lacans*. "Die Psychologie des 20. Jahrhunderts" 1980, Bd. 10, p. 721.

book, which collects the elements of postmodern linguistic and theory of literature; it says, that metaphors rule our life ("show me your metaphors and I'll tell you who you are" - the authors write), which simply means the lack of synchrony and diachrony differentiation in each language activity: Between competence and performance, grammar and lexicon, morphology and syntax, syntax and semantics, semantics and pragmatics, rule and analogy, homonymy and polysemy, connotation and denotation, vagueness and ambiguity, between natural language and picture one. All the borders are unstable, so middle cases constitute the largest number. The play of symbols, the play of metaphors and... the symbolic representation of the play, the metaphor nature of the play and... - everything this stimulates a neverending exegesis, the one of the film among others. "The cinema is too metaphorical", Wiesław Godzic maintains, "the excessive load of *signifie* (unlimited stream of information on the screen) is accompanied by the load of *signifiant* thanks to several contexts I admit [...] (or I recall as an analyst) in each act of perceiving of what is absent. Film is metaphorical in all respects even at the lowest levels of perception, which was established by psychoanalytic reflection. The 'modal frame' of film communication is metaphorical, which demands a cognitive-emotional distance against, 'the other' world on the screen, as well as it is supplied with signals - the invitation to enter this world".¹⁰ The cinema testifies this thesis in all respects, as it enters the area of postmodern thinking and experience. Films by Greenaway, Lynch, Allen - became the answer for of Stan Brakhage's dreams about an eye, which can see independently to the logic of composition and narration as well as the rules of Cartesian perspective; eye which suggests the watchers new perceptive adventures.¹¹ A cinema appears which wants to take the symbols of symbols, the metaphors of metaphors and so on and on and on...

From the hitherto considerations it can be concluded, that a feature or a set of features common for all the plays cannot be marked off. Nevertheless, in postmodern plays several meaning dominants which differentiate them from traditional plays exist.

First, the term "truth" is reduced, it is surrounded by a larger and larger indifference. For a long time film theorists have been pointing out

¹⁰ W. Godzic: *Film i metafora. Pojęcie metafory w historii i myśli filmowej*. (The Film and the Metaphor. The Idea of Metaphor in the History of Film Thought). Katowice, Uniwersytet Śląski, 1984, p. 161.

¹¹ See S. Brakhage: *Metafora on Vision*. "Film Culture" 1963, No. 30.

that the basic principle organizing audiovisual discourse is only seemingly the "logic of facts", which is also called the "logic of things" as it masks only the autonomous expressive activity of the showing language. It is known, however, that the existential logic does not exist. The logic itself consists in passing over the reality, so one can talk metaphorically only about the logic of things which is deployed on two levels existing in each text: On the level of "persistent enlarging the material world" (which means the level of ambiguity and semiotics polyvalence of objects and activities) and on the level of credibility of events and objects being presented dynamically in a discourse (which means the level of credibility of ideologic dominating in the film universe). Indefiniteness and credibility - these are the two points we refer to while talking about presented meaning (or even: sense) and both these aspects can be analysed from the prospect of factuality and objectivity, as they prevail in the meaning material. And yet... the creation of reality and truth illusion can be never treated as a rational principle arranging the world, as it is referred to expression first of all.

Using André Bazin's terms we can say that nowadays the "belief in reality" is more and more often displaced by "belief in a picture", since a large number of audiovisual texts is created thanks to the reduction of the area of real possibilities. As a result the receiver is given a "probable" version. And just the probability, not credibility, is the base of meaning in showing texts. But the real logic system cannot be based on a belief, conviction or opinion, so on the model of credibility or probability, even though this is what stimulates the watchers' reactions thanks to rhetoric.

There is still no base for putting a particular performance into a logical model which guarantees readability of the meaning and language correctness - independently of the matter whether the mental reasoning is being masked or not or the real features of the text are more or less exposed. In other words, the truth should be searched in deeper structures of the text, so beyond the evidence (the illusion of the reality) and rhetoric level (discourse elements) of the performance. Since in showing languages we can move probable events and objects to the area of evidence, the truth can be torn off the process of showing or the process of certifying. There is no doubt that till now in audiovisual performances most often the main role has been played by certifying aspects: Mostly by witnesses' comments or by the camera "acting" the witness. But one should remember that theatre, film and TV discourses are made as a result of competition among mental logic, intuition and imagination.

In modern texts several forms of activity, consciousness and thinking appear and they cannot be reduced to the only logical model. Nevertheless we can talk about a weak system based on the analogy for deontical logic (which is busy with rules) and temporal logic (which is busy with time), so about a language system where an opinion about the truth can be expressed while referring it always to the relationship between discourse and reality which is shown and talked about.

The "empirical truth" is being reduced to the "referential truth", that means to the one which adapts itself to what it is referred to, and which is subordinated to the social agreement very rigorously. The conditions of the agreement must be kept to initiate a conversation (the exchange of information), a special sort of conversation: Between the receiver and the text.

This kind of agreement on veracity is obviously an illusion of the truth, the notion of "efficiency" is - in this sort of conversation - as more important than the "truth"; but in the postmodern cinema this notion resolves itself into the efficiency of a free play. Eventually the problem of pragmatic truth appears to be the problem of particular correctness thus the correct executing of symbolical, metaphorical and other roles by the participants of an audiovisual communication. In this case the notion of ethical truth becomes very important.

But the notion of the good is also reduced: It is surrounded by a larger and larger indifference.¹² "Showing the good" consists, as it is widely known, first of all in the ideological characterizing of all levels of the audiovisual conversation. It does not need to be commented in more details in the light of what has been said above. The typical attitude of a postmodernist is a philosophical "so-so"¹³ - the complete ideological relativism - as it was strongly said by Jacques Bouveresse. Therefore there is so much "evil" in pictures by Greenaway, Lynch and other artists influenced by postmodern spirit.

Several cognitive aspects of postmodern transfer are discussed by Tony Wilson in the article *Reading the Postmodernist Image: A "Cognitive Map"*,¹⁴ where he points out the autoreference character of some

¹² The problems of logic and sthic in the cinema were discussed by i.e. A. Laffay: *Logique du cinéma*. Paris, Masso et C., 1964; G. Bettetini: *L'occhio in vendita. Per una logica e un'etica della comunicazione audiovisiva*. Venezia, uMarsilio Editori, 1985.

¹³ See J. Bouveresse: *Racjonalizm i cynizm. (Rationality and Cynism)* "Literatura na Świecie" 1988, No. 8-9, p. 352.

¹⁴ T. Wilson: *Reading the Postmodernist Image: A "Cognitive Map"*. "Screen" 1990, pp.

TV programmes, so their techniques, forms, subjects and figures who struggle noticeably against traditional ways of presenting; the author tries to prove that the postmodern aesthetics destroys so-called *veridical effect*, "the full (psychological, visual, etc.) truth consistent with reality",¹⁵ because the quality and subject of the pictures are not based on the common knowledge about the world. For instance, the hero of the serial *Small World* (ITV, 1988) who travels around the world does it only to find a beautiful woman, Angelika; she changes her address all the time, but our hero finally comes to the conclusion that he has been fascinated by a false model of womanhood. All his travel has the character of philosophical meditations (by the way, the action of the picture very often takes place at conferences, meetings and councils): "That time I was looking through the hotel for an hour, professor McCready, when I was opening the lift door on the 19th floor, yeah, it was her, at last, after all this toil and drudgery and this horrible quest, it was her". But the screen picture negates what the hero says. The watchers recognize the girl, who as an object of his desire was never Angelika, but her twin-sister Lily, a prostitute, "who was raped by a hairy man in a mask". Persse evidently has problems with the identification of the women, as the screen picture also blurs the differences between them. What the hero feels is equal to the way the watchers perceive two-dimensional picture of a woman. And so, on the meaning level the opposition between a maiden (a young employee of a scientific institute) and a prostitute appears. Wrong reasoning becomes the main subject, because in this strange screen hyperspace a play of roles takes place, which can lead us only to false or dark conclusions at least.

Next in the American serial *Moonlighting* (BBC, 1989) we can see repetitions of fragments from previous episodes in a set of pictures completely not connected with the logic of narration; this means that the serial does not refer us to its screen reality, but to the story of the same text being shown at the present moment. In other words, the point is in the "Play of fragments - this is postmodernism".¹⁶ Sometimes such a

390-407. The term "cognitive map" was made popular by F. Jameson. See Idem: *Cognitive Mapping*. In: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Eds. C. Nelson, L. Grossberg. London, Macmillan, 1988, p. 349 and the following.

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This definition is quoted by T. Wilson from *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. The philosophical context, in which this term is situated, the reader can find in: J. L. Austin: *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962.

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J. Baudrillard: "On nihilism". Quoted from D. Kellner: *Postmodernism as Social Theory*:

play is very complicated, for example in a documental picture *Art of the Western World* (Channel 4, 1990) or in the autobiographical work *Arena: Byrne about Byrne* (BBC, 1988) about the Scottish writer, who travels around his life together with a figure imagined by himself, and they even go to the future. Byrne's consciousness is, so to say, broken inside because its aspects are manifested by several actors and incredible pictures from the future (one of the actors even plays the role of the hero after his death), which breaks the impression of reality in all respects. Postmodernists maintain that contemporary culture goes towards moving pictures, which has nothing to do with reality even though they are involved in various ideologies (*postideologies?*) defined as postcapitalism or postmarxism.

"New TV universe with its celebration of a view - appearances, structures, consciousness-as-an-article - impends with reducing everything into a picture (showing) *simulacrum*", says E. A. Kaplan,¹⁷ as screen picture dualism leads to a complete mixture of truth and false. It goes like that because the free play of views and "play of fragments" is connected with one more sort of double-code, something being called *syncretic intertext* by Western theorists.

And so, the origins of intertextual play expressed by postmodernists are rooted in the thought of Claude Lévi-Strauss. "The *bricoleur*", says Lévi-Strauss, "is someone who uses 'the means at hand', that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous - and so forth. There is therefore a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been said that *bricolage* is critical language itself [...]. If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur* [My emphasis - T. M.]".¹⁸ Going on with these considera-

Some Challenges and Problems. "Theory, Culture and Society" 1988, Vol. 5, No. 2-3, p. 247. On the subject of this particular segmentation see also idem: M. Featherstone: *In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction*, p. 200.

¹⁷ E. A. Kaplan: *Rocking Around the Clock*. London, Methuen, 1987, p. 44.

¹⁸ J. Derrida: *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*. Translated, with an Introduction and Additional Notes by Alan Bass. The University of Chi-

tions, Derrida invented the theory of free play, which transforms the history of symbols, metaphors, metonymies etc. into a particular collage of genres and kinds, a particular quotation of quotation(s). The process of adopting the elements, or rather, the pieces or structure remains from other texts and their annexation for needs of his own text G. Genette called "archetextuality".¹⁹

So, films of a seeming entropy and allusion nature do not take part in a postmodern play. I am often surprised while reading, that *Nine 1/2 Weeks* (1985) by Adrian Lyne, a story showing sadomasochistic erotical performances where the roles are scrupulously written out by lovers, brings back Federico Fellini's *Otto e mezzo* to somebody's mind. That's true that the plot is based on feeling games (John and Lizy both prepare erotical performances in the *commercial* style, and her friends exchange their husbands among one another), but degenerated normality Lyne is talking about, finally appears to be a story with moral. Similarly the situation goes on in Věra Chytilová's picture *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam*. She, in fact, almost always makes works "about something else"²⁰ than the plot suggests. The "sexual plays in a clear comedy-sport tone" shown on the screen and practised by a group of friends, are only a warning against HIV. In this purpose the author disturbs the stream of the story by the camera look at the TV screen where we can see informational programmes, episodes from her previous films and characters from classical horrors – the presages of Apocalypse coming. All the *science fiction* films are not born from the postmodern spirit, as several critics say. In my opinion, even *Wargames* (1983) by John Badham, a story about a boy who using a computer begins a game called "Third World's War" with Pentagon's supercomputer has not a lot to do with the postmodern free play.

Far more closer to the postmodern cosmogony there are situated pictures by Jean- Jacques Beineix and Luc Besson and the works by authors called by French critics "new baroqueists". For instance *Nikita* by

cago Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 284-285.

¹⁹ See G. Genette: *Structuralism and Literary Critics*, and H. Markiewicz: *Odmiany intertekstualności (The Varieties of Intertextuality)*. "Ruch Literacki" 1988, vol. 4-5, p. 258.

²⁰ In 1963 V. Chytilová made a picture *O něčem jiném*, a splendid study on life of two contemporary women. Two plots going on simultaneously never crossed with each other, that is why the global sense of this show evoked – using Roland Barthes words – "the third sense".

Besson (the title is a quotation from a rock ballad by Elton John, 1989) is not only a story about mastered by an evil young girl drug addict, who falls in love and wants a steady life at last. The stylistical and emotional tone of this film, which reverts to comics aesthetics, changes all the time (there are mixed elements of suspense, melodrama, comedy and many other genre conventions here) and is based on several, dramaturgically unfounded "quotations". The director shows the world as a system of cruel and funny games, but he also plays a strange, difficult to solve game with watchers, and this way proves that everything important has already been told and shown in the cinema, that is why he was left to realize a new-old story.

This credo seems to be the same for the master of paradoxes, nonsenses and plagiarism, the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar, who takes care a lot of having his films perceived as wrong-made. His inclinations for pastiche and parody as well as desecrating what is held sacred are noticeable in each screen work and have a very refined form. In *Matador* a characteristic "Spanish game" takes place: A matador, who was hurt during a bullfight, runs bullfight courses. One of his students wants to prove that he is a real "macho" and that is why he tries to rape a girl. A policeman is in want of a killer. A woman wants to die together with his lover... The director introduces to this not very logical plot the "style play" using associations with film context of the avant-garde tradition: Erotics between melo and porno, psychology intertwined from the elements of parapsychology (the motif of clairvoyance) etc. Next everything this is overlapped with the double encoding of film language: Unconventional usage of colours (especially red) and sound preceding particular scenes. This play of appearances reached its culminating point in the picture *Mujeres Al Borde De Un Ataque De Nervios* (1987) which became a great festival succes. Next the "deadlock play", as far as the plot level and the place the cinema has found itself are concerned, is the picture *Atama!* (1989), the story about an orphanage boy who spent one night with a prostitute and after years desired to have her back. But the girl, now a porno and horror star, casts away his love (completely ungrounded, in fact - the director emphasises this by changing genre conventions all the time). This has an unexpected end: Ricky ties Marina with a rope and imprisons her at her home, waiting until she takes his declaration of love serious. Each of the partners plays several roles. Film plans and professionalism are also mixed with amateurish execution. Then the question arises: What is it everything for? Almodóvar answers: Because Spain (like the whole world) found itself

on the crossroads, and the cinema, seemingly to other arts and mass media, looks for its own way and origins, while turning and decomposing ethic and aesthetics systems.

The complexity of the phenomenon of turning and ruining all the systems is splendidly illustrated by anti-American cinema of Jim Jarmusch. It is enough to mention *Mystery Train* (1990). The first story entitled *Far from Yokohama* is opened by a scene showing large wheels, chimney and tender with an inscription "Union Pacific" approaching from the horizon. This symbol of Hollywood Wild West shown in a strange way, the symbol which is being pursued by strange Indians and which runs in a station placed on an immense prairie where another sheriff arrives in a week (and it is Thursday only), does not explain almost anything, among other things because in a sound layer we can hear music and words of *Love me tender...* by Elvis Presley. And then... Then a couple of young bored... Japanese arrive to Memphis; they wear T-shirts with colourful images of youth idols and they have walkman headphones on their ears. They walk to the "holly place", to... "Presley". Accidentally in the same hotel where the Japanese live a young Italian (so, just not American!) widow spends a night and in her dream she sees a ghost; not her husband's - but Presley's one. But the confused ghost notices what is wrong, apologizes to the widow and disappears. In the two other short film stories the director makes fun of American myths in the same way, realizing them "upside down" the traditional genre conventions. All the heroes from *Mystery Train* do not want to do anything at all, as there is no sense around, nothing can be understood... even Jarmusch cinema is boring, nay, sunk in the boredom and does not cherish any hopes in the future.

According to hitherto considerations Ludwig Wittgenstein's theses on stylesness of a play seems to be testified. In a family of free plays there are situated really very many subject and stylistical elements connected very loosely. That is why I think that intertextual postmodern play is not based on two-code manner, as Leslie Fiedler and Charles Jencks think.²¹ There is no doubt it is based on a multi-code manner. The artists put "quotations of quotations" into their works (the fragments of texts hav-

²¹ Compare Ch. Jencks: *Wstęp do języka architektury postmodernistycznej* (An Introduction to the Language of Postmodern Architecture). In: *Postmodernizm - kultura wy-czerpania?* (Postmodernism - The Culture of Tiredness?) Ed. M. Giżycki. Warszawa, Akademia Ruchu, 1988; Ch. Jencks: *Ruch nowoczesny w architekturze* (The Modern Movement in Architecture). Warszawa WAiF, 1987.

ing been quoted earlier as distinctive codes or myths) or – if it can be said so – the symbols, metaphors and metonymies of quotations from different culture areas. In the conception of two-code manner the false seems to be the numeral prefix, but this does – as I think – not deny the assumption taken by Stefan Morawski while writing: “According to several researches being busy with the history of this ‘play’, which is synchronous with the history of probably all the arts and its contemporary career – the dialogue between texts takes different forms. The new avant-garde (just like the classical one from 1910-1930) often used quotations (to introduce a *meaning storm* by texts in a text) and reflective comments of an existing text and did it in a conventional language (so-called metatext). Postmodernism, as I assume, prefers from several plays something which was called hipotext by G. Genette in an excellent dissertation *Palimpsest*. The basic text is referred to another initial one, which is called supertext, which is next travestied. One refers to it by allusion, often in an ironical manner, it is pastiched or parodied, it is transformed a bit or even not at all. The parody – let’s add – cannot be scoffing or nostalgic in this case, it should not demand anything worth a candle. There is admissibly a scoffy tone only, the mimicry”.²² I agree with the assumption that postmodernism generates a palimpsest-like culture in all respects, but in my opinion this is a palimpsest constructed on several supertexts at the same time, or rather on several fragments of several supertexts. Besides, I think that in a postmodern play, except the scoff tone and mimicry, there may exist very serious accents or even tragical ones, but the play should be an amusement first of all, of course. Only a clown, however, has the greatest and neverending fun.

The role of a clown is splendidly personified by Jean-Luc Godard. His picture *Prenom: Carmen* (1983) illustrates greatly the process of creating a play à la postmodernism and several contexts it can be situated in. The interpretative key to the problem is given the watchers by the director: And so *Prenom: Carmen* is a film about film and a film in a film. In one of the initial scenes on the screen we can see Godard acting himself and the uncle of the main heroine; Godard is incestuously related with her, as we can suppose, and he pays with creative decline and madness for it. Each situation shown in the film is involved in several external contexts, which urges the heroes’ on schizophrenical perplexity, and the watchers are probably often irritated by all the sputter,

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S. Morawski: *Postmodernizm a kultura filmowa* (2) (*Postmodernism and Film Culture* (2)). “Kino” 1990, No. 3, p. 14.

as the departure of the art philosophy the film talks about, are Carmen's strong words: "It is not us", she says, "but the world is fuckin'". And there is nothing strange in the fact that the uncle's love for the girl is prostituted as well as Godard's love for the cinema. The 10th muse - is a human intimacy *show*, which today replaces a normal life and takes away the whole sense of the existence and the hope for the future. "What stands before surname?", Carmen asks. The answer: "The name". "And what was before the name?", asks the hero in a Derridian way. The answer is a long time lasting silence. So, the human is sentenced to suffering in nothingness, but this is also an artist's fate, which is testified by the canon of multiplied collage (I would call it "*la grande buffet* of film meals"), brought to absurd in the "film about film". Godard-director on the screen makes film about offenders imitating "people with a camera", since this makes easier for them commit to banditry; but this version of events is filmed by another group, which suddenly swap their equipment for guns and a rifle fire begins. The thriller is transformed into a self caricature grounded with many other genre conventions. Each gesture of the heroes is empty, every word spoken by them strikes with the lack of logical meaning. And the watcher probably has a stroke by the formal aspect of intertextual play being run by Godard: Into this world, complicated enough, he puts beaches and a waving sea as a background for the heroes quoting proverbs and psalms, reciting lines from *Hamlet* and *Elektra*, and even singing from time to time (what for? - that is the question) arias from Bizet's *Carmen*.

"And this way the future society has less to do with Newton anthropology (as well as structuralism and the theory of systems) and more with pragmatics of language particles". - I am quoting words by Jean-François Lyotard - "There is a wide range of language plays, which can be called a heterogeneity of elements"²³ - because "Narrative function loses its functors: Great heroes, great dangers, great journeys and a great aim. It is diffused in narrative, denotive, imperative, descriptive clouds of language elements, from which every one transmits *sui generis* pragmatic values. We all live in a cross-point of several of them. We do not always make stable language combinations, and the features of combinations we make are not always possible to be transmitted"²⁴. That is why Lyotard reduces human thinking and acting in a *postmod-*

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J. F. Lyotard: *Kondycja postmodernistyczna* (*Postmodern Condition*). "Literatura na świecie" 1988, No. 8-9, p. 281.

24

Ibidem.

ern area to searching and "devising contresamples, so looking for a 'parados' and testifying it by new rules of thinking".²⁵ "While setting to work with facts", I am still quoting *Postmodern Condition*, "which are neither true nor false, with limits of control precision, quantum, collisions of incomplete information, 'fractals', disasters, pragmatic paradoxes - the postmodern science defines a theory of self evolution as a non-constant, impossible to correct, paradoxal one. This science changes the meaning of the notion 'to know' and explains how this change may be done. It does not create what is 'known' but 'unknown'".²⁶ The postmodern science is created as a result of several plays, so the creative invention, which is called the paralogy by Lyotard. As it is known, paralogism is based on a misunderstanding from the logical point of view, which leads towards a wrong conclusion. But in the conception of the French thinker who questions logical assumptions, the paralogy leads - very rarely, to be sure - towards innovation and invention. In this paralogical play there is no division into a subject and an object, since two horizons are joined: The one of the "subject", who tries to understand, and the one of the "object", which is to be understood. These are plays which testify the postmodernist's conviction that the man is able only to get to know in an incomplete manner. In other words, the prelogic of such an intertextual play has the beginning in *contrthinking* and *contracting* leading to the creation of *contrtexts*.

But how can we answer the questions born in mind while watching such a "contrfilm" as Lynch's *Wilde at Heart* for instance? While do not Lula and Sailor behave as people do in life, but play all the time? Why do they shout, yell, scream and howl as if they were abnormal? Why does Lula, who loves Sailor, propose a stranger bandit simply "fuck me!"? Why do not the couple of lovers clean spew, even if the stink makes impossible for them to do anything (it is emphasised by a long dialogue)? Why does Willem Dafoe show his rotten teeth? Why does he have a moustache à la Clark Gable and behave like a cowboy from Sergio Leone's pictures? Why were the following scenes realized in a different - but difficult to identify - genre convention?

The answers for all these questions are connected with a general postmodernist's attitude towards the "play". Assuming that the non-sign reality does not exist he maintains that the false and the truth also disappear. And bragging also disappears. An artist creates a stream of

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 283.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 290.

signs which goes to infinity. And this is where the fancy for neverending changing of the genre conventions and styles, which lacks certain rules, derives from. As a result, this leads towards cheating by a play. This idea has a splendid outline in *Twin Peaks* by Lynch and other works by this artist. The criminal story is changed into a social drama soon, and this one is turned into a multi-thread melodrama, where elements of thriller, political picture and parapsychology dominate, which are next involved in *science fiction*-like contexts. As Roland Barthes would say, Lynch cheats using language, as he does not abide by basic rules of communication, he "quotes" and repeats several drama and picture structures; he simply blurs the lines between the world and imagination. But there is hidden a deeper reflection on human nature behind this language conception. Here agent Cooper truly confesses: "I can't forecast what Windom Earl does next". Earl does not simply play a game of chess. He plays, so cheats. But in Lynch's pictures all the heroes cheat. They cheat twice – since they use different languages for necessity and the life consists of the play situations; and people while appropriating different masks, behaviours and words – become everlasting gamblers, everlasting actors.

translated by Andrzej Cimara

GRA GIER W KINIE POSTMODERNISTYCZNYM

(Streszczenie)

W swoim artykule autor poddaje analizie różne gry z konwencjami gatunkowymi, stylami oraz różnymi elementami tradycji i kultury współczesnej jakie prowadzą twórcy filmów postmodernistycznych. Teza, wokół której organizuje swój wywód, opiera się na przekonaniu, że reżyserzy wciągają widzów do gier opartych na różnych, bardzo swobodnych, skojarzeniach. W rezultacie, odbiorcy filmów dekonstruują obrazy ekranowe i nieustannie – używając słów J. Derridy – „ześlizgują się ze śladów jednego znaczenia w stronę innych śladów”, wybierają znaczenia uprzywilejowane, ale szybko z nich rezygnują, ponieważ każdy następny element gry zmienia charakter komunikacji i wprowadza nowe tropy interpretacyjne. Postmodernistyczna gra jest bowiem zaprzeczeniem tradycyjnej czystości myślenia.

Zdaniem autora, zjawisko to ma swoje źródło w Wittgensteinowskiej teorii gier, polegającej na nieustannym pojawianiu się i znikaniu podobieństw między różnymi elementami aktu komunikacyjnego, a więc ma charakter „podobieństw rodzinnych”, które zachodzą na siebie i krzyżują się w skali dużej i małej. Geneza takiej intertekstualnej gry sięga również myśli C. Lévi-Straussa o konieczności posługiwania się

językiem krytycznym (w formie *bricolage*) oraz koncepcji „archetekstualności” kultury G. Genette’a. W tego rodzaju praktyce językowej zachwianiu ulegają rozróżnienia między diachronią, a synchronią, kompetencją a wykonaniem, gramatyką a leksyką, morfologią a składnią, składnią a semantyką, semantyką a pragmatyką, regułą a analogią, konotacją a denotacją, niejasnością a wieloznacznością oraz między językiem naturalnym a obrazowym. Wszystkie granice są płynne, istnieje tylko gra symboli, gra metafor, gra aluzji, gra cytatów... i symbolika gry, metaforyka gry, aluzyjność gry, cytowalność gry..., i to wszystko pobudza nie kończącą się egzegezę gry gier.

Autor urozmaica swoje rozważania przykładami własnych skojarzeń jakie przyszły mu na myśl w czasie lektury esejów F. Ponge’a i sztuki *Glas* Derridy oraz oglądania m.in. *Wyliczanki* i innych filmów P. Greenawaya, *Miasteczka Twin Peaks* i *Dzikości w sercu* D. Lyncha, *Po godzinach* M. Scorsese, *Nietykanych* B. De Palmy, *Filmu* S. Becketta, amerykańskich seriali telewizyjnych, *Nikity* L. Bessona, obrazów P. Almodóvara, J. Jarmuscha i dzieła Godarda z 1983 roku pt. *Imię Carmen*. Prowadzi on swoistą grę z czytelnikami artykułu, która ilustruje postmodernistyczny proces zmyślania, czyli tworzenie ciągów znaków zmierzających w nieskończoność i służące oszukiwaniu widzów za pomocą gry.