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Architectural remedy for love. City and architecture in polish films of the 1960s

Fig. 1. Joanna – main character of the film *Lekarstwo na miłość* (*Remedy for love*) against the background of the modern architecture – the terrace of CDT. Courtesy of The National Film Stock Library, Warszawa, Photo No. F-2306–171



Situation of the Polish cinema in the 1960s

Ewa Mizerska in the *Film Quarterly* in 1999 wrote: *'From the very beginning, cinema is an art characteristic of a great city – for many decades the majority of its viewers originated from those who, according to the Marxist terminology, are defined as an industrial working class, which meant poor people who could not afford a better entertainment'*¹ [5]. For Poland, the 1960s were the times of getting back to normal after the period of Socialist real-

ism² [9] which, as we know, in the years 1948–1956 dominated many areas of life, including architecture and film.

² Leopold Tyrmand (1920–1985) in his journal wrote about the Socialist realism architecture: *Communists believe that they are creating the most wonderful epoch in human history and that this era must find its expression in huge architectural forms, full of monumentality and pathos. (...). Of course – functionalism, which expresses material content and defines exactly the usefulness of a given object for man, is devoid of monumentality and pathos; therefore, it was considered as hostile, destructive, killingly monotonous and inhumane. Theoreticians of the Socialist realism architecture had to look for alliance in the past as the presence did not confirm the legitimacy of their postulates and proved these claims to be reactive and anti-artistic.* Tyrmand L., *Dziennik 1954*, Original Version, Publishing House Tentem, Warszawa 1995, p. 200.

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¹ Mizerska E., *Janusowe oblicze filmowego miasta*, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, No. 28/1999, p. 39.

At this stage we would like to present the situation of the Polish cinema and film in the period which was called the small stabilization³. After the year 1956 some democratic changes were introduced in the country and this became an impulse for creating broader schemes of film activity, where the film was supposed to reflect the reality as well as describe and make a comment about the present times. Unfortunately, this short period of freedom came to a swift end. The existing system of censorship made it impossible for the film makers to tackle the subjects connected with

³ Name of this period in the most recent Polish history comes from the play written by Tadeusz Różewicz *Świadkowie, albo nasza mała stabilizacja* (1964). The play can be characterized as minimalism of requirements and passivity of actions. Różewicz writes about historical and cultural situation of the 1960s. The characters in the play do notice many imperfections of the surrounding reality. However, they do not want to change it because they are simply afraid to lose the acquired material values.

the current social and political situation. This contributed to the production of numerous film adaptations of national literature canons and entertaining films – film comedies⁴. In the years 1961–1966, 119 films were produced in Poland; as many as 24 out of this number were classed as comedies⁵[1]. The film title which is included in the title of this article – Jan Batory's 1966 production named *Remedy for love*⁶ – is an example of this genre.

⁴ Haltof M., *Kino polskie*, Publishing House Słowa/Obraz/Terytoria, Gdańsk 2004, p. 135.

⁵ Haltof M., *Kino polskie*, Publishing House Słowa/Obraz/Terytoria, Gdańsk 2004, p. 176.

⁶ The screenplay was based upon the book by Joanna Chmielewska under the title *Klin*. Director: Jan Batory, screenplay by Joanna Chmielewska, Jan Batory, starring: main characters; Kalina Jędrusik (main character, Joanna), Krystyna Sienkiewicz (Janka, Joanna's friend), Wieńczysław Gliński (Janusz, boss of money forgers' gang), Andrzej Łapicki (captain of Militia).

Modernistic architecture and the plot of the film Remedy for love

The plot of the film is not very complicated. Joanna, an architect, lives a pretty boring life, shared between work in the architects' office and dates with her lover [Janusz, boss of money forgers' gang]. One day, when she is trying to write an article about esthetics in interiors, she answers an apparently insignificant call. Since then things diverge from their ordinary course. We desire to solve the mystery – who the mysterious Honorata is, about whom the people who call Joanna keep asking. The main character walks around the city (Warsaw, as it is the case here) together with her friend Janka to find the solution and a remedy for unhappy love, which she finds in the arms of a militia officer (Andrzej Łapicki). Many times the film story develops in the space of a modern city, complemented with real life buildings. From the historical viewpoint, many of them entered

the canon of the Polish architecture, like Central Department Store CDT (1949–1952), *perfect in the style, but with terrible finishing*, according to the *Dziennik 1954* by Leopold Tyrmand⁷, Supersam (1952–1962) or Eastern Wall (1958–1968) [9]. Modern architecture and the city became a frequent motif used in Polish films in the 1960s. Flat and simple building facades, wide perspectives of modern housing estates became the mark of the new times, the times so different from the previous era. Modern architecture became an ideal background for the creation of imaginary stories related to real life in a socialist country. Krzysztof Kornacki wrote about the re-

⁷ Tyrmand L., *Dziennik 1954*, Original Version, Publishing House Tentem, Warszawa 1995, p. 203.



Fig. 2 Joanna and Janka in front of the Supersam. Courtesy of The National Film Stock Library, Warszawa, Photo No. F-2306-279



Fig. 3 Joanna and Janka while walking in the passage Ściana Wschodnia (Eastern Wall). Courtesy of The National Film Stock Library, Warszawa, Photo No. F-2306-388

ality created in the Polish film of the 1960s: *the small stabilization cinema created the image of a non-existing country*⁸ [2].

Modern architecture in the film *Remedy for love* comprises the leading examples of the Polish modernism. The first building to be presented is Central Department Store CDT designed by Zbigniew Ignatowicz and Jerzy Romański. This building in its form corresponds to famous examples of European trade architecture and in the film it is becoming the background of the meeting of two main characters: Joanna and the Militia captain. The café with a characteristic balcony hanging above the street becomes a certain stage on which a performance is acted: the performance involves the city life with all its aspects, people moving and looking at one another, having conversations with the sound of cups and plates on the tables in the background. The trading part of the mass of the CDT building protruding above the balcony complements it naturally, at the same time framing the street in a superb way. The minimalist architecture of the building is used as a background for the film plot. The architectural form of the building is by no means dominant in the film, however, without its sublimeness and reticence each performed scene would be deprived of its thrilling sensuality.

The building of Supersam⁹ (supermarket) in the film space plays the role of the main characters' – Joanna and Janka – meeting place. Its original architecture was used in a few sequences of the film, among others, the telephone conversation of Janka and Joanna. It is also a point from which they start the further search for solving the

mystery. The futuristic structure with the characteristic inscription SUPERSAM became a strongly recognized motif shown in the film. Undoubtedly, the fact that this building forms the background of the film was a sign of respect towards modernistic architecture on the one hand and it proved how important it was for the Warsaw inhabitants' awareness on the other. As I mentioned before, modernistic architecture faithfully reflected the spirit of the 1960s. The modern form of the building, so different from the Socialist realism lacelike motifs, wonderfully fit the existing iconosphere of the city. In my opinion, the Supersam architecture was supposed to confirm the thesis about the openness of Poland and Polish architecture to global tendencies. The director Jan Batory used the building as a modern counterpoint in the space of the city and we can assume that the building's architecture again, as before, became a natural scenery where the film's characters have their adventures.

French director Jacques Tati (1907–1982) was quite reserved towards modern architecture; in an interview which he gave in 1958 he said: *I do not like uniformity at all (...) To be honest, today it is really difficult to tell the difference between a food store and a pharmacy*¹⁰ [8]. Tati's films, especially the series of Mr. Hulot's adventures (*Mr. Hulot's Holidays* 1953, or *My Uncle* 1958) presented the image of modern architecture seen by the eyes of a person who does not fully understand it. For him, it becomes a series of misunderstandings and constant problems with how to find himself in its interiors. The Batory's film has a stylistic concept which is different from the French one. The modern architecture, which is the background of the film, is contrasted with the historical structure of the city and the architecture of the past. Joanna's flat is situated in an old tenement house, (however, her window overlooks a modern housing estate) and the place where the

⁸ Kornacki K., *Bohater w przydeptanych kapciach*, [w:] *Człowiek z ekranu. Z antropologii postaci filmowej*, M. Jankun-Dopartowa, M. Przyłipiak (eds.), Kraków 1996, p. 77.

⁹ The building was designed by Maciej Krasiński; for the first time in Poland an innovative construction of a hanging roof was employed here. The building was pulled down in December 2006 and replaced by an office block designed by Stefan Kuryłowicz.

¹⁰ Penz F., *Architektura w filmach Jacques'a Tati*, *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, No. 28/1999, p. 113.



Fig. 4. Janka in the cafe on the CDT terrace. In the background the characteristic BGK building designed in 1931 by Rudolf Świerczyński. Courtesy of The National Film Stock Library, Warszawa, Photo No. F-2306-164

forged banknotes are produced is located in a dingy basement. These scenes which are set in the space of the city are marked with an 'invisible' inscription: novelty, sun, progress, modernism.

The real architecture of the 'Eastern Wall'¹¹ buildings became an illusory space where Joanna and Janka – the main characters – are walking. Their figures are reflected in the shopping windows behind which numerous consumer goods are housed. In this way, multiplication of space shown by Jan Batory in this particular fragment, reminds the viewer of motifs from Jacques Tati's films, for example *Mr. Hulot's Holidays* 1953, or *My Uncle* 1958, where glass and transparency were employed by the director as a universally defined symbol of modern times.

¹¹ Authors: Zbigniew Karpiński, Jan Klewin, Andrzej Kaliszewski.

Modernity in the film *Remedy for love* creates an illusory image of architecture and the city on the one hand, while on the other it equips the architecture with non-material features. The main characters' figures reflected in the shopping windows lose their material form for a moment. We could even say that in this way they assume the form of modernistic caryatids who do not support anything, but with their figures they carry the modern architecture into a non-material space. To sum up this part of my reflections, I would like to quote the words of Francois Penz: *Film as the registration (...) of vision constitutes a mirror in which architects can see the reflection of buildings and the city. However, they may not like this reflection*¹² [8].

¹² Penz F., *Architektura w filmach Jacques'a Tati*, Kwartalnik Filmowy, No. 28/1999, p.115.

Modern city in the film Remedy for love

In many films made in the 1960s we can observe the process of creating a non-existing image of the city space¹³. It is a formally distorted image which is adapted for the needs of the screenplay. The characters in those films move around against the scenery of real architecture, yet its real context is usually neglected to a large extent. The city in the film *Remedy for love* can be divided into two spaces: a modernistic or modern one in which good film characters are seen and an old one which is reserved

¹³ The 1920s were the times of fascination with the idea of the city in the film picture. It was then that such significant films were made as: *Paris sleeps* by Rene Clair (1924), *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang (1926) or *Berlin, symphony of the great city* (1927) by Walter Ruttmann. Each of those films pictures the city as an independent spatial unit which is ruled by its own rights and in a sense uses the human genius to create its own power [6].

for the people whose dealings are not quite clear. The main seat of the money forgers' gang is situated in the basement of a dilapidated tenement house, which is not a nice place, rather dark and with no sunshine. On the other hand, the good city is literally flooded with sunshine, with broad perspectives of the film city and no traces of the past [except for the scenes at the old town market place in Warsaw]. The context is defined in a way that has no connection with the reality, the viewer gets the impression that the film plot develops in two parallel spatial layers: one spins the film story, the other is the space where urban interior and modern buildings are on the foreground.

Each of the chosen film sequences presented in this article uses the modern architecture and the city space in a different way for the purpose of showing or complementing the story of the film. Fictional stories which are set in the

real space become a sort of a sign or symbol of a new spatial reality of the Polish cities at the beginning of the 1960s. A certain unreality and location of the plot of the film in the existing reality give the film picture a new dimension.

From the viewpoint of an architectural researcher, it seems really important to analyze the aforementioned phenomenon while examining the reality in which fiction and certain unreality are part of the created spatial and visual iconosphere of the city. To sum up these reflections upon the city in the film, I would like to quote the words of Ewa Mizerska who defined the image of the city in the film in the following way: *The cinema (...) could present the city faithfully, almost scientifically (due to its photographic nature), (...). In this regard, a particularly valuable technical means was montage, thanks to which an artist was able to move instantly from the centre to the suburbs, from the inside of the building onto the street, from the roof of the skyscraper to the basement*¹⁴ [5]. City

¹⁴ Mizerska E., *Janusowe oblicze filmowego miasta*, Kwartalnik Filmowy, No. 28/1999, p. 39.

and architecture in the Polish film of the 1960s became determinants of progress and development. They provided opportunities to create the image of Poland as a country which is modern and lives up to the Western world. The image of city and architecture recorded on the film tape can be interpreted as another stage in the discussion on the phenomenon of memory in architecture. Building museums, archives, historical research, caring about the national heritage, including the film heritage – all these actions prove that we deal with the culture that does not want to forget and cannot forget. Walter Benjamin said that history and memory together mean a search for dominant force. Memory is a fragment of the past which enters the present times in a way that is uncontrolled and expressive and thanks to this an individual is able to sense hegemony of history [6]. A film picture became a record of an epoch and at the same time provided a possibility to commemorate architectural structures which are significant for the Polish architecture history in their natural environment. This means the city, combined with human sensations, desires and expectations for a new bright future.

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Architektoniczne lekarstwo na miłość. Miasto i architektura w polskim filmie lat 60. XX wieku

Architektura i miasto modernistyczne stały się w latach 60. XX wieku szeroko wykorzystywanym motywem w polskim filmie. Płaskie i oszczędne elewacje budynków, szerokie perspektywy nowoczesnych osiedli były wyznacznikiem nowych czasów, tak odmiennych od przeszłości. Architektura modernistyczna stała się doskonałym tłem dla tworzenia fikcji w odniesieniu do realnego życia w kraju socjalistycznym. W wielu filmach z tego okresu mamy do czynienia z tworzeniem nierzeczywistego obrazu przestrzeni miasta. Jest to formalnie zniekształcony obraz dostosowywany do potrzeb scenariusza. Bohaterowie obrazów filmowych poruszają się w scenerii realnej architektury, ale z rzeczywistym kontekstem ma to bardzo mało wspólnego. Zjawisko kontekstu jest definiowane w sposób oderwany od rzeczywistości, odnosi się wrażenie, że fabuła filmu toczy się w dwóch równoległych przestrzeniach: pierwsza z nich opowiada historię poruszaną w filmie, druga jest przestrzenią, w której pierwszoplanową

rolę odrywają wnętrza urbanistyczne i nowoczesne budynki. W tytule celowo umieściłem tytuł jednego z filmów z tego okresu *Lekarstwo na miłość* (reż. Jan Batory, 1966). Fabuła filmu jest niezbyt skomplikowana. Pani architekt o imieniu Joanna prowadzi nudne życie, które dzieli między pracę w biurze architektonicznym a spotkania z kochankiem. Pewnego dnia, kiedy próbuje napisać artykuł o estetyce we wnętrzach mieszkalnych odbiera z pozoru nieważny telefon. Od tego momentu nic nie jest tak jak było. Rozpoczyna się walka o rozwiązanie zagadki, kim jest tajemnicza Honorata, o którą pytają ludzie dzwoniący do mieszkania Joanny. Tytułowa Joanna wraz przyjaciółką przemierzają miasto (w tym przypadku Warszawę) w poszukiwaniu rozwiązania zagadki. W wielu miejscach akcja filmu toczy się w przestrzeni modernistycznego miasta, którego dopełnieniem stają się rzeczywiste budynki, takie jak Supersam czy CDT.

Key words: city, architecture, polish films

Słowa kluczowe: miasto, architektura, polskie filmy