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## **Artistic Thinking in Film Education (from Reproduction to Creation)**

### **Abstract**

Making an attempt to describe the threats to the development of artistic education, one should particularly emphasise the failure of noticing the mission of art and culture in the vision of a contemporary man. Above all, the threat is posed by the depreciating attitude of the mass media turning culture into entertainment and spiritual space merely into a battlefield for trivial and ordinary goods. The problem of globalization deeply afflicts culture, particularly artistic education. But are the tasks of artistic education as defined within the humanistic approach to the Culture of Man not fundamental to the future of “thinking art”? The matter is worth of a serious and continuous debate, irrespective of the political correctness and the pragmatic attitudes “for today”. However, particular responsibility lies with the didactics in the field of art.

### **Key words**

thinking, art, education, work of art, experience

### **Mediating between intellect and emotions**

In the Krzysztof Kiesłowski Faculty of Radio and Television, University of Silesia in Katowice, the students acquire knowledge and practical skills in creating professional conditions for a successful cooperation in an artistic group through shaping non-conformist attitudes and thus provoking transgressive activities. “To liberate or to constrain?” remains the funda-

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mental question of artistic education. An answer to this question focuses on the source of teaching in the field of film art which is the concept of *artistic thinking*.

It is a common assumption that thinking is equivalent to every flow of conscious psychological processes (e.g. deducing, processing information, associating, remembering, concluding, justifying, comparing and controlling all the above mentioned). Thinking, however, is our activity, always on the critical run, in a dialogue, continuously debating. While acquiring knowledge, thinking still retains the courage to question the reliability of its results, because it does not cut corners or apply easy solutions and simplifications, nor does it yield to the dangerous confidence in the obviousness of formulated truths.

Philosophy occupies itself with various categories of thinking: discursive, historical, logical, moral, conceptual, infinite and source thinking among others. However, the task of didactics in the field of film art is to distinguish "thinking images" as the base of the film artist's network. The particular nature of thinking images was described by Arnheim<sup>1</sup>:

My earlier research taught me that artistic activity is a form of reasoning, in which perception and thinking interweave inseparably. I came to realise that a person who is painting, writing, composing or dancing, is actually thinking with their senses. [...] An analysis of our knowledge regarding visual perception made me realise that the unusual mechanisms through which the senses embrace experience, are almost identical to the operations described by the psychology of thinking<sup>2</sup>.

Images rule over our reasoning and open up an imaginative world, another level of existence. The visual language of film reveals to us this, which escapes reason. Therefore the film art is irrational in nature and the film reality cannot be treated one-dimensionally. It is comprised of many layers and levels, and the deepest one appearing in front of us is not any less real.

What is the difference between philosophical thinking and artistic thinking? Without entering the intricacies of the issue, but trying to confine oneself to the very basics instead, one can ascertain that the philosophical thinking distinguishes the idea of truth while *the artistic thinking*

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Arnheim (1904–2007) – psychologist, esthetician, theoretician of art and film. In the 20s he occupied himself with experimental psychology and philosophy. He was also one of the pioneers of European film studies (Film as art). He worked among others at Harvard and Michigan Universities, developing the psychological theory of seeing.

<sup>2</sup> Vide: R. Arnheim, *Myslenie wzrokowe*, tłum. M. Chojnacki, Gdańsk 2011, p. 5 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

distinguishes the idea of beauty, and is typical of every form of creativity and of the reception of art<sup>3</sup>. The fruit of philosophical thinking is science and philosophy. The fruit of *artistic thinking* is a work of art. *Artistic thinking* can feed on the artist's imagination (meaning illusions), and can thus contain illusions. Philosophical thinking might not have anything to do with beauty. However, those differences do not exclude a certain affinity. Hegel had noticed it in the horizon of the essence of beauty, which serves "almost fanatic and manic strive to rouse people from their immersion in the sensual, the common and the individual and to lift their sight towards the stars; as if completely forgetting the divine, they were going to settle for ashes and water like worms"<sup>4</sup>. Is it not that also the horizon of the value of *artistic thinking* is opening here?

### **The workshop of *artistic thinking***

The students of the Faculty of Radio and Television (Directing and Film and Television Directing majors) already in their first year submit their first two short films, based on the same content of the screen event. The final duration of one film is ten seconds and it consists of three takes. The production is based on two narrative visions: the first – *THE IMAGE OF HISTORY*, and the second – *THE HISTORY OF IMAGES*. These short films open the students to the realm of *artistic thinking*<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Vide: J. Tischner, *Myślenie w żywiole piękna*, Kraków 2004, Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Fenomenologia ducha*, tłum. Ś. F. Nowicki, Warszawa 2002, p. 17 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

<sup>5</sup> The subject of *artistic thinking* is continued in the following years through practical works. Short films are based on two forms of narration; the first called: *Magical realism* and the second called: *Through images – An image*. *Magical realism* – a film impression in the genre of a "creative document", based on the events registered in a documentary form and presenting a made-up (created) hero. *Through images – An image*: the fictional construction of this short film is inspired by a painting of a famous painter. The essence of *artistic thinking* is to create film events leading to the action presented in the painting. The final frame is the painting itself. The character of the short film is supposed to be coherent with the plastic vision, atmosphere and mood of the painting (the character of lighting, the mood of the interior, the atmosphere of the story, etc.). The maximum screening time is 180 seconds. An example of such narration could be "The Mill and the Cross" directed by Lech Majewski, which is an adaptation of the Michael Gibson's book dedicated to "The Stations of the Cross" by Pieter Bruegel or "Shirley: the visions of reality" by the Austrian director Gustav Deutsch inspired by Edward Hopper's paintings.

The concept of *artistic thinking* is also introduced through an example of film works organised into two stages. Stage one – the introduction: narrative mode – *THE IMAGE OF HISTORY*. The dramaturgy of this mode is subject to the logic of events (cause-and-effect relationships) as well as their chronology. An example of such artistic vision can be the first battle scene from the film “Gladiator”<sup>6</sup>. Here is the chronology of the screen events (shortened):

TEXT ON THE SCREEN<sup>7</sup>

At the height of its power, the Roman Empire was vast, stretching from the deserts of Africa to the borders of Northern England. Over one quarter of the world’s population lived and died under the rule of the Caesars. In the winter of 180 A.D. Emperor Marcus Aurelius’ twelve-year campaign against the barbarian tribes in Germania was drawing to an end. One final stronghold stands in the way of Roman victory and the promise of peace throughout Empire.

ECU – a hand touching ripe spikes of wheat. Maximus looks at a robin flying away. Soldiers and equestrians line up for battle. Caesar Marcus Aurelius observes the preparations. Maximus standing among the soldiers.

SOLDIERS

General! General

MAXIMUS

Lean and hungry...

[...]

QUINTUS

Soldier, I ordered you to move those catapults forward, they’re out of range.

MAXIMUS

Range is good.

<sup>6</sup> *Gladiator*, directed by R. Scott, distribution: Universal Pictures-DreamWorks SKG, premiere on 1 May 2000. Polish dialogue list A. Deka.

<sup>7</sup> The Courier New font is widely used in professional screenplays.

QUINTUS

The danger to the cavalry...

MAXIMUS

This is acceptable. Agreed?

[...]

**Maximus spurs the soldiers on to fight.**

MAXIMUS

Fratres!

SOLDIERS

Maximus!

MAXIMUS

Three weeks from now I will be harvesting my crops, imagine where you will be and it will be so. Hold the lines, stay with me. If you find yourself alone riding in green fields with the sun on your face, do not be troubled, for you are in Elysium and you're already dead!

[The men laugh]

Brothers, what we do in life echoes in eternity.

**Soldiers line up. Catapults ready to attack. The soldiers ignite the heads of the arrows. Dynamic, short takes on preparations and awaiting the signal. The bloody battle begins.**

QUINTUS

Catapults ready!

SOLDIERS

Archers, Ignite!

Archers, draw!

Loose!

MAXIMUS

Rome will prevail!

**Burning arrows shower on the heads of Germanic people. The battle continues. The Romans prevail.**

The structure of the “image of history” type of narrative based on the chronology of events constitutes itself in the process of the real impartiality of the spatiotemporal reality. What does it mean in practice? Trying to simplify it, we can say that it is a process of “registering” aimed on the most faithful representation of the reality perceived by the senses. There is a strong conviction that since this narrative form allows establishing a particular bond with the audience, the representation of events in the chronological order might reveal another horizon of seeking out the “truth” of the screen story. In this pattern we deal with “registration” deprived of the necessary author’s commentary. The emotions of the audience are expected to complete the message.

### **The value of a work**

Is it that in case of *artistic thinking* the student’s creative participation is more conscious? Is the work more beautiful or more true? Does its value increase? Searching for answers to these questions, it is first of all necessary to identify the peculiarity of the art didactics (in all majors). It has to be compatible with the character of the creative activity as well as the structure of the creative process. There is a certain ambiguity here, which can be expressed – after Prof. Władysław Stróżewski<sup>8</sup> – in dialectical oppositions. Therefore the creative process takes place in between the poles of coincidence and necessity, consequence and unpredictability, submission and domination, spontaneity and control, liberty and rigor, acceptance and rejection, innovation and perfectionism, creation and discovery, etc. There are far more oppositions involved, since the creative process situates itself between chaos and well-ordered structures, indefiniteness and specificity, infinity and finiteness, typicality and uniqueness, emotionality and sensuality, perception and expression. Therefore each of these dialectical oppositions contains an element of the great mystery of creation, whose algorithms remain unknown, as are its results. The fruits of the creative process can vary, just as the creative activity itself takes on various forms, importance and intensity. Also, the creative effects of the activity can be successful to various degree, and it is very difficult to estimate their parameters. All the above mentioned observations are specific signals for the teachers – the evaluation of the

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<sup>8</sup> Vide: W. Stróżewski, *Dialektyka twórczości*, Kraków 2007.

goals and results in the field of art education is by no means simple and unambiguous.

Let us now proceed to presenting the second stage of the *artistic thinking* phenomenon, namely the narrative mode called the *HISTORY OF IMAGES*. The opening sequence of the film "The Hours"<sup>9</sup> will serve as an example. The film touches upon the hidden part of the reality of human existence. An immaterial space narrative. It is a multilayer story. An irrational one. Here is the sequence of events (emotions) presented on the screen. Virginia buttons her jacket up restlessly. But why so incapably? She leaves home. Almost runs across the garden. Virginia sits bent by the table. She writes hurriedly.

VIRGINIA (vo)

Dearest,  
I feel certain that I am going mad again.  
I feel we can't go through another of those  
terrible times. And I shan't recover this time.  
I begin to hear voices, and I can't concen-  
trate.  
So I am doing what seems the best thing to do.  
You have given me the greatest possible hap-  
piness.  
You have been in every way all that anyone  
could be.  
I know that I am spoiling your life, that with-  
out me you could work.  
And you will I know. You see I can't even write  
this properly.

She does not hesitate. She holds a pen in her trembling hand. She is surrounded by some ceremonial glare. Gentle morning light lits up her peaceful face. Her hand still trembling. A moment of anxiety. She is still quiet. Nobody breaks the silence. Nobody enters the room. She blushes softly and then unexpectedly turns pale again. What does this blush mean? Is it love, hope, fear? Still, Virginia is uncertain. There is no return to happiness. To peace. She writes.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Hours*, directed by S. Daldry, distribution: Paramount Pictures, Miramax Films, premiere on 24 January 2003. Polish dialogue list Magdalena Czartoryska-Meier.

VIRGINIA (vo)

What I want to say is I owe all the happiness of my life to you. You have been entirely patient with me and... incredibly good. Everything has gone from me but the certainty of your goodness.

Virginia approaches the river. She bends down. Takes a stone in her hand. Hides it in her pocket. She goes down into the river. He enters the house. Spots the letter. Reads.

VIRGINIA (vo)

I can't go on spoiling your life any longer. I don't think two people could have been happier than we have been.

Virginia plunges into the murky water. The letter falls out of his hands and slowly drops on the floor. He runs out of the house. Virginia's inert body floating down the dark river. Only soft words can be heard. Her last confession. A magic ECU. Virginia's palm touching the letter.

VIRGINIA (vo)  
(whispering)

Virginia...

Seemingly, everything is mixed here. Time of the events runs in unexpected directions. Chaos. Narrative confusion. Everything is strange here, enigmatic, mysterious, changing within itself. Only questions. The spectator's surprise needs silence, no thought can interrupt this moment. Only silence is necessary. These and similar observations begin to form a magical and mysterious train, moving from the outer and the visible to the inner, the invisible, the hidden but intuitively sensed.

An attempt on making a logical and reasonable record of emotions while watching this sequence is doomed to failure. The description of reality appears here as an intrinsically developing form, acting only according to the rules of the artist's choice. It is a surprise to "see" the *close-up of Virginia writing the letter*. There is no such take in the editing project of the director. Moreover, a suggestion of the *gentle morning light lighting up Virginia's face* appears. Similarly, such take does not exist. Imagination of



the spectator creates an imaginary reality. The impulse given by the association and the teeming images evokes a real and actual state of emergency. The softness of light stands in contrast with the growing anxiety. The heroin does not sit by the table. We can only see one ECU: her hand. The voice-over (vo) attributed to the character in the location forms a coherent message. The audience has no problem identifying the author of the letter as the heroin of the scene. These emotions are filled with the space of intuitive premonition. In this way the director inspires the audience's imagination using the creative potential of *artistic thinking*, and giving his story an illusory character of a real story perceived by the audience as an existing fact.

Let us also point to an excerpt from an analysis of the film masterpiece "Citizen Kane" directed by Orson Welles<sup>10</sup>, as written by Professor Królikiewicz, a distinguished director and lecturer of the National Film School in Łódź. It is a very personal point of view, a pure form of analysis in the category of *artistic thinking*. Below, a description of a screen event:

Rain, thunders, soft music. A close-up from above of a board presenting an idealised portrait of a young, beautiful and smiling Susan and then passing it by, showing a signboard advertising Susan Alexander's restaurant, to close on a glass roof through which a room with drunk Susan sleeping by the table and the waiters surrounding her can be seen. A journalist sits down as the woman wakes up. She tells him to go away. A waiter informs Susan that the person is a guest from the chronicle who wants to speak to her about Kane. The journalist gets up and walks towards a public phone situated in the hall of the restaurant. He calls his boss informing him about Susan's refusal and relates the Thatcher's memoir<sup>11</sup>.

The commentary by Professor Królikiewicz:

Let us reverse the film tape to the beginning of the take where the camera closes on the glass roof of the restaurant. [...] Only now (and – believe me – I watched this film several times) for the first time I felt and understood what this scene is about: with the rain and lightning, with thunders and wind... It is a descent to

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<sup>10</sup> Orson Welles, born 6 May 1915 in Kenosha (Wisconsin), distinguished American director and film and theatre actor, one of the most interesting characters of the contemporary cinema. In his teenage years he directs theatre plays, mostly Shakespeare, in which he made interesting appearances as an actor. After the famous radio broadcast on the invasion of the Martians, which caused panic in the West Coast, he arrived in Hollywood to make his debut with "Citizen Kane".

<sup>11</sup> G. Królikiewicz, *Rózyzka – próba analizy filmu Orsona Welleśa "Obywatel Kane"*, Łódź, 2012, pp. 134–135 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].

Hell... And of whom? Of one of the Lucifers. It is a “devilish ride” – this movement of the camera... as if one was reading a passage from a medieval demonological treaty... Black magic... Here is the beginning of Sabbath... Here is an illustration of the frenzied infernal forces, unleashed there, in the projection room... Luciferism launching an offensive: We are searching for truth... What is the provenance of this truth, its powers, its wings? Infernal. And so, the poor victim, the fallen soul of Susan Alexander, is shouting to Satan there in Hell, “go away!” So we must be in Hell...

It is interesting how here, at the bottom of Hell, the problem of Light is approached... I would like to return to what we so daringly called the satanic emotion of this scene. I mean the staging measure of the story, which is essentially a subjective narration. And still, the camera closing on the roof of the nightclub does not create any pressure of the naturalistic description of the narrator’s physical presence. He is not present in the beginning of the take. Could he be “off”? He is not there. The camera is descending. But is it really “the camera”? Of course not! Of course not! It is him, the Lucifer or his servant rushing “on his wings”... so rushing mentally... The camera – with its flight, its movement – is a metaphoric illustration of the personage, which is in fact this real individual, a certain Thompson.

And so the camera is perfectly following the route of the devil of this scene: the route of a metaphor. It literally describes what we feel, at the same time evaluating the purpose of this flight, because there are appropriate archetypes in the human culture with a moral judgment encoded in them. Here is the camera floating down the track described in the cultural stereotype and illustrating the metaphorical sense of a human being – here he is called a filmmaker, an editor of a film chronicle – the sense of the truth seeker, Thompson. At that moment a linguistic element is created – one of the important structural elements of the peculiar film style.

The camera does not slavishly hold on to the narrator’s character. Why? What else is it about? It is again about the artistic economy, about the camera not being limited to the narrator’s physical presence in the frame, in his single role, the realistic one, immediately present through the simple photographic description. [...] Delay the explosions of emotions. Fog the meaning. Here is a piece of advice to art: “I owe this film to my ignorance. If this word seems inappropriate to you, replace it with innocence” – said Welles himself about “Citizen Kane”<sup>12</sup>.

What direction does this analysis point to? Where should we search for the mystery of Orson Welles’ *artistic thinking*? In his film, the great director imposes subtleties, which format the audience’s thinking and teach about the higher complexity of the world going beyond the binary

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<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 135

thinking. It is a category allowing a better understanding of the world by widening the horizon of understanding reality. We contemplate the lofty (*Schelling*), the subconscious, because what happens in reality, happens *in between*, or, to use the musical metaphor, happens in the space of an interval. A melody is not made entirely of separate sounds, it is something *more* – it is the interval, the movement, the passage. And so the flickering of the real and unreal events, meaning existence and non-existence, underline the paradox of the musical phrase. Here lies the mystery of the *artistic thinking* in “*Citizen Kane*” – in undermining the obviousness of reality.

But how a film work made in the spirit of *artistic thinking* should be described? “The world on the screen” – a film work created by an artist on the spur of his creative imagination is an autonomous, invented structure, because it is always something “created”, formed, made up. In this way, by making the work appear a real story, *artistic thinking* becomes “a construction and a game”.

## Aesthetic experience

Below, I attempt on presenting some establishments systematising my intuitions concerning the potential of *artistic thinking*. The basis of this concept is an assumption that *artistic thinking* aims on discovering the hidden order of the world and drives at more or less radical mobilisation of reality in the making of a film work.

### Establishment I

*In the domain of art the borders of reality get crossed.*

Assuming the category of rationalism as well as assuming that every work of art and the created world is simply a reflection of an empirical being, cannot be defended in the light of *artistic thinking*. The invented world is a product of the artist’s creative imagination and even if we can find some elements of reality in it (*ontological reality*), it remains an autonomous, invented structure. An artistic work is always *something made-up*, formed, invented – not only ideal but also fake. It is *a construction and a game*.

### **Establishment II**

*Artistic thinking demands “disintegrating the space-time” of reality.*

The idea of “disintegrating the space-time” leads us to the essence of the “starting point”<sup>13</sup>. The starting point of the creative process requires some change, some modification of the existing situation. The “real” reality needs to undergo a change or at least one of its constitutive components must be negated, challenged, abolished. Inertia underlines the potential of a creative act. Creating something essentially new requires the effort of imagination, the willingness to take the risk of overcoming resistance, the established routine and convictions.

### **Establishment III**

*The artist gives their work an appearance of a real story, which is then perceived by the audience as a fact.*

The conditions of *artistic thinking* can be referred to the Heidegger’s essence of *thinking about art*<sup>14</sup> as transcendental presentation leading to a secret place in space-time: the very limits of the world perceived through senses. One can describe this *place* using the metaphor of a mirror – that it is neither a hallucination nor reality. Its immateriality is visible, its materiality not obvious.

### **Establishment IV**

*Artistic thinking leads first of all to the discovery and forming of a symbolic space, also in terms of presenting events and giving them meaning.*

This space points to a certain direction, but does not force to anything nor impose any obviousness. The word ‘symbol’ itself can be raised to the level of a philosophical concept, a secret sign. Organising its own being, the symbol at first shows *something*, to then get to know *something* else. An inherent trait of the symbol is its mysteriousness resulting from the duality of principles: dividing and connecting, parting and meeting. The symbolic is the changing. Therefore, the symbol includes in its essence the inclination towards concealing and unveiling.

<sup>13</sup> Vide: W. Stróżewski, op. cit., Chapter 3.

<sup>14</sup> C. Woźniak, *Martina Heideggera myślenie sztuki*, Kraków 2004.

### Establishment V

*In the concept of symbol a glimpse of metaphysical space is shown; the relation between the visible and the invisible – the combination of the sensory phenomenon and the non-sensory meaning.*

Broadening the essence of symbol to the role of a universal aesthetic principle is not that easy. Symbol does not automatically cancel the tension between the space of idea and the sensory world. The disproportion of the form and essence refers beyond the sensory presentation (form of communication). Therefore, in this disproportion the wavering and indecisive nature of symbol can be seen.

### Establishment VI

*The audience engages their reflective consciousness in the symbolic narrative mode.*

In a way, the spectator's mind *melts* into the "ritual" of *artistic thinking*. To understand the symbolism of the images, it *opens* its reflective consciousness and imagination, and refers itself to the cultural codes. Gradually, step by step, it *breaks through* the incomprehensible messages and deciphers the pieces of information contained in the structure of the work. One decoded symbol clarifies another. Slowly, the knot gets untangled. The meaning (as planned by the author of the work) is always present in the idea of every take, every scene, every sequence as well as the entire work, however initially it is beyond the comprehension of the audience (the choice of meaning is not random, it is a postulate of rationality). The seemingly complex composition gets dissected into simpler impressions, fractures of thoughts. It gets reduced to parts which can actually communicate a certain meaning. But it is not over yet. Subsequently, all of it has to become a whole again. Even if one element is missing, the entire effort is in vain. The superficial formalism of the train of images still remains a quiet void. And only when the last element of the symbolic thinking finds its place, only then everything becomes clear. Everything is just as it should be – simple and transparent. Logic in every detail. The meaning of the work shines with its full *light*.

## Establishment VII

*For the insiders: "To give birth to a dancing star"*

*Artistic thinking* means to be sensitive to the surprising, the alien, the incomprehensible. To the coincidence. To be ready to reach beyond what is given, existing, planned. "I tell you – calls Zarathustra – one must have chaos within oneself, to give birth to a dancing star"<sup>15</sup>. *Artistic thinking* does not surrender to the existing rules, because the artist – by overcoming oneself – needs to constantly create *SOMETHING* that overgrows him. *Artistic thinking* reveals a glimpse of a new form of the hidden world order.

And one more remark: the above reflections on the phenomenon of *artistic thinking* offer no principles or unique thoughts, nor do they draw clear boundaries, because such is the very nature of creating. There is no unequivocalness in thinking art.

*Translated by Marta Bręgiel-Benedyk*

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<sup>15</sup> Vide: K. Michalski, *Płomień wieczności – eseje o myślach F. Nietzschego*, Kraków 2007, p. 93 [trans. M. Bręgiel-Benedyk].