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Talking about Films. Interviews with Polish Film Scholars – Review

Published by Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, the book *Rozmowy przy filmie. Wywiady z polskimi filmoznawcami* (Żakieta et al., 2016) is the result of a series of meetings conducted in 2013–2015 by the Student Film Society of the University of Lodz. The cycle, titled “Meet Your Film Specialist”, was initiated by Ewa Ciszewska, the Society’s supervisor. The invited guests included scholars from various institutions from the whole country, e.g. employees of the Chair for Media and Audiovisual Culture at the University of Lodz – the first academic institution in Poland educating future film specialists.

The main idea behind the cycle was to present the guests’ academic output and discuss the motifs behind particular books. Each of the guests had recently published an acclaimed book offering new topics for academic discussion within the discipline. As the editors of the volume explain, “the main goal of the meetings was to acquaint the participants with various methods of research applied by scholars dealing with audiovisual texts as well as with the intricacies of the publishing process” (Żakieta et al., 2016, p. 7). In addition, the cycle was meant to popularise film knowledge among people who are interested in this area of culture. Most events were held outside the university – for instance, in Cetus bookshop and Tektura café.

The book’s educational value lies in the survey of research methods applied in modern cultural studies. The interviewees comment on their choice of academic

discipline and dilemmas linked with the necessity to find a compromise between their wish to develop rare academic interests and the need to attract a wider readership. Reading the book, one may not only enjoy many entertaining stories from the lives of the academics but also get to know individual scholars, who until now have been merely short bios printed as a blurb on book covers.

The interviews were conducted by doctoral students involved in the activities of the Student Film Society as well as its supervisor, Ewa Ciszewska. As a result, the interviews represent a variety of discussion approaches: some follow the “master-apprentice” model, typical of the academic world, while others are conducted by partners sharing their views and experiences.

The first chapter of the book is especially interesting. While conversing with Ewa Ciszewska, Elżbieta Durys gives an account of linking her film and political interests together in her academic work; she also describes the process of working on her book *Amerykańskie popularne kino policyjne w latach 1970–2000* [American Popular Crime Cinema in 1970–2000]. Answering Mikołaj Góralik’s questions, Tomasz Kłys discusses the chief developments of German cinema, concentrating on Weimar Republic and Third Reich films. All fans of German cinema will be curious to find out that Kłys’s book *Od Mabusego do Goebbelsa* [From Mabuse to Goebbels] provides a counterpoint (as the author himself declares) for Siegfried Kracauer’s canonical account of German cinema in 1913–1933. *Miasto Atrakcji. Narodziny kultury masowej na przełomie XIX i XX wieku* [The City of Attractions. The Rise of Mass Culture in the Late 19th and Early 20th Century] is both the title of Łukasz Biskupski’s book and the topic of the interview he gave to Katarzyna Żakieta. The book “provides Lodz-based empirical material supporting the theory of the ‘double origins of André Gaudreault’s cinema” (Żakieta et al., 2016, p. 95). Interviewed by Katarzyna Figat, Natasza Korczarowska-Różycka explains how she decided to look into the problem of history in Polish cinema. She also elaborates on her analysis presented in the book *Inne spojrzenie. Wyobrażenia historii w filmach Wojciecha Jerzego Hasa, Jana Jakuba Kołskiego, Filipa Bajona i Anny Jadowskiej – studium przypadków* [Another Vision. History Imagined in the Films of Wojciech Jerzy Has, Jan Jakub Kolski, Filip Bajon and Anna Jadowska – Case Studies], adding a commentary on the films’ acoustic aspect.

Spektakl – granica – ekran. Mur berliński w filmie niemieckim [Spectacle – Border – Screen. The Berlin Wall in German Cinema] by Marta Brzezińska provokes a discussion initiated by Karol Józwiak on historical discourse in German films. Maciej Robert, the author of *Peretki i skowronki. Adaptacje filmowe prozy Bohumila Hrabala* [Pearls and Larks. Film Adaptations of Bohumil Hrabal’s Books] explains the institutional context which influenced the making of films based on Hrabal’s works. Conversing with Michał Dondzik, Katarzyna Mąka-Malatyńska offers a backstage view on the five books she wrote, focusing especially on her latest work, *Widok z tej strony. Przedstawienia Holocaustu w polskim filmie* [A View from This Side. Representations of the Holocaust in Polish Cinema]. Piotr Sitarski – the interlocutor of Agata Pospieszńska – discusses the structure of his book *Sens stylu*.

O twórczości filmowej Ridleya Scotta [The Meaning of Style. On Ridley Scott's Cinema] and criticises the paradigm of "videotape film studies", focusing on a detailed analysis of individual film frames. Dominika Kawczyńska, the author of *Polska Miauczyńskich* [The Miauczyński's Poland], explains to Katarzyna Żakieta why she felt compelled to research Marek Koterski's films. Presenting Koterski's output in a wider context, Kawczyńska refers to Andrzej Munk's *Zezowate szczęście* [Bad Luck] (exploring the theme of a personality with the external locus of control) and Wojciech Smarzowski's films (confronting the audience with the "Poles' inability to handle freedom") (Żakieta et al., 2016, p. 145).

The contents of every chapter are supplemented with suitable paratext: the interviewees' bios as well as bibliographies and filmographies, very useful for readers who may want to explore particular topics. The book's compelling visual side owes much to the cover – showing a still from Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), recognised as one of the first film auteurs – as well as photographs of the interviewees opening each chapter. According to the editors' account, the published versions of the interviews were subject to minimal editorial changes, preserving the natural flow of the conversations.

The book's greatest fault is its smallish size, which leaves the reader hungry for more. This shortcoming is recompensed, however, with the volume's attractive and educational content. As the editors declare, the "interviews reveal inspiring portraits of authors eager to share their specialist knowledge and **love for cinema** [author's emphasis]" (Żakieta et al., 2016, p. 8). For all readers who have previously read the interviewees' books, *Rozmowy przy filmie. Wywiady z polskimi filmoznawcami* will offer a chance to broaden their knowledge. Others, in turn, will surely feel compelled to read them.

Bibliography:

Żakieta, K., Góralik, M., Pospieszyńska, A. (eds.) (2016), *Rozmowy przy filmie. Wywiady z polskimi filmoznawcami*. Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Summary

This article is a review of the book titled *Rozmowy przy filmie. Wywiady z polskimi filmoznawcami* [Talking about Films. Interviews with Polish Film Scholars], edited by Żakieta, K., Góralik, M., Pospieszyńska, A. (Łódź, 2016). The reviewer pays attention to different topics brought up by interviewees in academic discussion. Both the series of meetings mentioned in the book's title and the book itself were also meant to popularise film knowledge among people interested in audiovisual culture. The greatest advantage of the book is sharing with readers not only their extensive knowledge, but – what is at least equally important – their love for cinema.