



Photogenic qualities of aquatic landscapes in the works of Roman Polański

Barbara Kita

(Institute of Cultural and Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Silesia)

ORCID: 0000-0003-3616-9863

Abstract

In his debut feature film, *Knife in the Water* (1961), and then in the subsequent films *Cul-de-sac* (1966), *Pirates* (1986), *Frantic* (1988), *Bitter Moon* (1992), *Death and the Maiden* (1994), and *The Ghost Writer* (2010), Roman Polański uses the element of water in a significant way. It is particularly interesting when water is visible and constitutes a crucial element of the films' narrative—woven from water images and aquatic landscapes. So, how do aquatic landscapes function in Polański's films? I believe that he develops his individual film style in which the element of water—its being filmed—both emphasizes the protagonists' motivation, often conditions it, and is also a very important detail which shapes images and, therefore, affects the aesthetics of those images. Does a specific kind of aesthetics created by aquatic landscapes—which are characterized by a particular form of photogeneity—exist? Polański certainly does not use common visual *clichés*. The beauty of his aquatic landscapes is of a different type. They are interesting, original, non-intrusive, yet noticeable—even if they do not dominate the whole image. The text follows the director's visual strategies which prove the photogenic potential of his films. I argue that this photogeneity—stemming from, *inter alia*, aquatic landscapes—determines the attractiveness of Polański's films.

Key words:

aquatic landscapes, film, Roman Polański, photogeneity

Roman Polański's films are full of aquatic motifs. They are visible in both his first short student film, *Two Men and a Wardrobe* (*Dwaj ludzie z szafą*, 1958), and later in the rest of his artistic output wherever the theme of water reappears. In his debut feature film, *Knife in the Water* (*Nóż w wodzie*, 1961), and then in the subsequent films *Cul-de-sac* (1966), *Pirates* (1986), *Frantic* (1988), *Bitter Moon* (1992), *Death and*

the Maiden (1994), and *The Ghost Writer* (2010), Roman Polański uses the presence of water in a significant way. At first glance, the director seems to have a special attitude (not necessarily a sentimental one) toward this element. Water appears in many of his films—and not always in the same manner. Sometimes it can be almost transparent. However, much more often, it appears in a very fundamental and ubiquitous way, becoming an element which determines both the story and the protagonists' behavior. Regardless of the way it features in the films, whether it is “only” a motif, “an ornament,” or a broad wave flowing into the space of the frame, water gives meanings to the images. In this study, I am particularly interested in the cases where water is visible and constitutes a significant element of the narrative, which is woven from water images and aquatic landscapes. So, how do aquatic landscapes function in Polański's films? I believe that he has developed his individual cinematic style in which the element of water—its being filmed—both emphasizes the protagonists' motivation, often conditions it, and also constitutes a very important detail shaping images and, therefore, affects the aesthetics of those images. So, is there a specific kind of aesthetics created by Polański's aquatic landscapes? The aesthetic approach in this case is associated with a cultural understanding of “film landscape.” This type of thinking is represented by Ilona Copik (2017, 50):

If, in the context of film landscape, I mention a kind of sense commitment, it refers not so much to a form of participation in the cinema as a cultural institution or in the diegesis, to participation based on ‘involving’ the viewer in the diegetic space, but to ‘entering the image,’ meaning recognition of problems addressed in the film in connection with the landscape, identification-projection of problems, and—as a result of these steps—generating feelings, emotions, and activities triggering the need to involve oneself in reality.

The above reasoning clearly unveils not only the intention to approach film landscape from an aesthetic perspective (although it is already clearly exposed), but also (or particularly) to put the emphasis on the consequences that film landscape has on recipients.

Photogeneity can be understood as a variation of film poetics, or it can lead to a characteristic type of reflection upon the specificity of film as art. This type of reflection is derived from the first decades of the 20th century and is characteristic of the theorists and creators of the *avant-garde* in the 1920s and 30s. On the one, hand they wished to solve the mystery of the new cinematic medium: its potential rooted in the power of motion and stillness; on the other hand, however, they wanted to create reality in a new way by means of this medium. Slowed shots, almost motionless frames with slowly flowing or almost standing water or—on the contrary—presentation of the power of water constitute the essence of a kind

of photogeneity particular to film, the essence of cinema itself. This uniqueness of film as a medium was already noted in film theory in the 1930s—which recognized, in the specificity of movement and its skillful usage, the essential feature of film art characterized by photogeneity. I presume that this photogeneity stemming from, *inter alia*, aquatic landscapes determines the visual attractiveness of Polański's films.

Previous research on the visual nature of Polański's works has usually been conducted from the perspective of creating space and exposing its typical features: closed/open space or the symbolism of significant places. That research has also included studies of landscape—in this case the problems of symbolism and meanings of landscapes presented by Polański have usually been discussed. Mariola Dopartowa (2003) explored some aspects of space and symbolism in her *Labirynt Polańskiego* (Polański's labyrinth) by emphasizing the theme of fire, blood, and water while interpreting infernal landscapes. "In films, photos destroy space and cutting destroys time" (Dopartowa 2003, 35)—Polański's words incite reflection on reality in his films, on the status of reality, which we normally accept as spectators with the naive childlike belief that it is not subjected to creation. Although he offers a kind of reality that—according to Dopartowa—seems simple, it "actually contains a Baroque richness of small details characteristic of the director's view of reality" (Dopartowa 2003, 34). Having that in mind is crucial for the shots of landscape, which play a role going far beyond decorum or background in his films. These landscapes are defined by Andre Gardies (1999, 148) as expressive, narrative, and connotational and which also introduce a discursive quality (e.g., the so-called inner landscape). In my opinion, however, in order to define the function of Polański's landscapes, it would be most appropriate to use the notion of a "landscape-catalyst", as having an impact on other elements of diegesis and characters in particular. What distinguishes it from other types of landscapes—also leading to changes in diegesis—is its active nature: "It is a component of diegesis evoking the production of another element or transforming another component of the same diegesis Landscape-catalyst is such a component because of its being perceived by the protagonist; it is a factor of this transformation" (Gardies 1999, 149). I think that Polański can be listed among the artists (Bergman, Fellini, Herzog, Godard, Gus van Sant, Kiarostami) who treat landscape as a crucial element of their artistic output, therefore the development of a certain artistic *continuum* forming a type of ideal map, a geography of style, can be traced. Such an imagined geography allows for a journey—not only for the characters in the film, who are usually in motion in Polański's films—but also for the viewers. Because the viewers survey various topographies through similarity of corresponding landscape images (the notion is used by Maurizia Natali [1996] to define film landscapes because landscape in film is never aesthetically clean or semiotically homogeneous, it constitutes a configuration founded by phantom similarities), they also syncretize landscape in visual

continuity in Polański's films (from *Knife in the Water* to *Pirates* and *The Ghost Writer*, through *Cul-de-sac* and *Death and the Maiden*). Therefore, recognizing the landscape dominant, the fact that the landscape is constructed, that it is a kind of performance within the film, they participate in the discursive strategy proposed to them by the director. It is also characteristic that Polański cleverly avoids creating "postcards"; he does not treat film images as postcards, even when he locates the plot in very conventional landscapes which can be *clichés*, for example, in Paris, Los Angeles, or on the ocean. It is actually difficult to claim with complete confidence that the landscapes seen through Roman Polański's lens are pretty—in the sense of being pleasant to the eye, enchanting in a way they could be if they were presented by someone else, as Polański, after all, does not use common illustrative *clichés*. The beauty of his aquatic landscapes is of a different type. They are interesting, original, non-intrusive, yet noticeable—even if they do not dominate the whole image. And here the subject of photogeneity comes into focus.

Viewers stubbornly want to see reality in Polański's film images. The presented landscape may unfortunately support this tendency among viewers. However, the landscape turns out to be more abstract (that is, constructed) than it seems. Fragmented, tailored to the needs of characters trapped in difficult relationships or memories, of protagonists about to make serious choices, shaped in order to act inside the film—the landscape transforms characters by affecting both the plot and the actions performed by characters who are trapped on a yacht, a ship, or an island, who are survivor-like characters. The weather usually did not fall in line with Polański's plans concerning seasons of the year and expected weather conditions (the warmest winter in *The Ghost Writer* resulting in unwanted sunny views or freezing cold weather in *Cul-de-sac*, or a storm which damaged the ship in *Pirates*). Therefore, it was necessary to create landscapes in a fragmented manner, sometimes using studio or digital techniques.

In culture, water usually has the power to purify and renew, to transform in order to become someone better, someone in a new incarnation. While discussing the meaning of water in Polański's films, I will briefly (because motifs of water in terms of landscape and aesthetics are not significant here) refer to a concise conclusion drawn by Dopartowa who states that "Polański uses the motif of water in order to construct a reversed world . . . , when it appears on the screen it announces a misfortune or signals that what the viewers see has a hidden dark side" (Dopartowa 2003, 73). While focusing on the struggles of film characters accompanied by water, one may claim that the presence of this element certainly has an impact on the characters' behavior and even on their lives. Not only via metaphorical expression in important but discrete components of the constructed world (non-landscapes), but in very clear spaces which are determined by water reservoirs. After a very difficult cruise in horrible weather, in pouring rain, and in the atmosphere of a thriller, the protagonists of *Knife in the Water* reveal the dark side of their personality.

A completely new, and thus unpredictable, disposition emerges in the extreme conditions of an aquatic landscape of horror. At the same time, however, it turns out that the experience of the, in a way, fatal cruise does not have repercussions later—as if the *status quo* is restored, the weather changes, the environment changes (no longer on the water), and they, as if nothing happened, return to their lives before the storm. Apparently, nothing changed, even though the suspension of action in the final scene of the film is unambiguous in terms of the future of each protagonist and their relationship. It is clearly summarized in the final scene depicted in a photogenic shot in which a car is standing at a crossroad in pouring rain. The car seemingly imprisons the protagonists, who perhaps want to understand what happened and start their lives together once again. The violation of a relationship between two people through a third person's intrusion and an inability to leave due to weather conditions, to being on the water or in the middle of water flowing around the characters, is a common state of affairs in Polański's films, for instance in *Cul-de-sac*, *Pirates*, *Death and the Maiden* or *The Ghost Writer*. Tadeusz Lubelski, while reaffirming the perfectionism of Polański's directing, noticeable as early as in *Knife in the Water*, makes an observation about the two games the artist plays with the audience: an intratextual game based on rivalry between genres or change of characters' status and an extratextual one. In the latter, a significant role is played by the confinement of space to a yacht; the sense of encirclement is strengthened by the downpour, storm, and water flowing into the protagonists' lives and making them both unveil their complexes or fears and doubt their own position. Lubelski believes that such a directing of confinement is essentially a demonstration of one's own artistry: "in Kawalerowicz's and Polański's films, the necessity of performing the whole intrigue in the limited space of a train or yacht enforces a kind of proficient virtuosity, especially in the field of cinematography and cutting" (Lubelski 2000, 181). He stresses the fact that the realization of the debut full-length feature film was "a gamble" for the young artist wanting to make films abroad. This type of specific self-constraint is also visible in Polański's mature work, becoming at the same time a trademark of his output. His films lack epic stories, even his works not confined to dramas featuring three characters (such as adaptations of theater plays) are not spectacular in their nature. Polański's characters struggle alone against the elements, diseases, relationship breakdowns, and interpersonal difficulties. Moreover, the author's undoubted commitment to aquatic landscapes, returning to the possibilities provided by locating a film's action in severely scenic and significant bodies of water, make his films take on universal characteristics and a unique kind of photogeneity.

After all, photogeneity in the most original approach is based on the analysis of films—the concept and its definition are derived from this kind of commitment among artists. Already in the 1920s, *avant-garde* artists noticed and used the fact that film and photography, owing to new techniques, produce an extraordinary

effect in comparison to a natural effect. On the one hand, photogeneity is an ability to use the properties of a photo-chemical image—the photosensitivity of certain substances. On the other hand, it also identifies a poetic or aesthetic quality characteristic of certain people or objects that are revealed through an image by strengthening that quality. Therefore, one of the originators of the concept and, at the same time, a filmmaker—Jean Epstein—was mainly fond of natural landscapes dominated by images of water, rough sea, or raging waves crashing on a shore. Such images were present in his most spectacular film, *Storm-Tamer (Le Tempestaire, 1947)*, in which the director presents an exemplification of the phenomenon of photogeneity in film, suggesting that the most beautiful results are achieved by filming meteorological phenomena such as rain, storms, or the fury of the sea. The theoretical trend represented by Epstein is defined as poetic by Jacques Aumont (2002, 78). Aumont finds features of film photogeneity in texts authored by Epstein, like *Bonjour le cinéma (Good Morning, Cinema, 1921)*. Initially, he noticed it in the master shot, a shot which is so characteristic of films and is referred to as “the soul of cinema.” However, it is not a sufficient condition for photogeneity because Epstein claimed that the essence of photogeneity is lability, ephemerality, transience. It is associated with speed, so it is fast and fugitive; “photogeneity is characterized by movement and simultaneous change in space and time” (Aumont 2002, 78). Epstein paid a lot of attention to the uniqueness of film time because he thought that cinema gives a new, so far unknown, definition of time. Both the continuous and the discontinuous is completely changed by the phenomenon of cinematography, which—due to subjectivity and arbitrariness—processes these two phenomena; according to Epstein, cinema is a machine producing time (Aumont 2002, 29).

Louis Merzeau (2003), while reinterpreting the phenomenon of photogeneity from the contemporary point of view in his work *De la photogénie (On photogeneity)*, stresses the importance of the unusual properties of the image which condition the appearance of the photogenic effect. He believes that the desired effect is achieved only through the relation between nature and technology, and “thus photogeneity is a matter of illusion and projection” (Merzeau 2003, 201). The art of techniques—play of light, blackout, angles of view, perspective, shots, optical special effects—create photogeneity. It is rather a matter of movement than a completely stable image; it refers to the mobile aspects of the world; it is located in something imperfect, unstable, in an attempt to change an existing status without achieving it. Faces or objects are not photogenic in themselves, but their variations, avatars, and technical processing (there is also numerical photogeneity) by means of a film camera can be. An object does not necessarily have to be beautiful to be photogenic—on the contrary, it may be ugly and photogenic nonetheless. If film images are too sublime, too beautiful, they turn into *clichés* which are used all over the world as the simplest form of identification of film *milieu*. Polański’s aquatic landscapes are far from aesthetical *clichés*: his landscapes make spectators think,

they confront both characters and viewers with boundary, often life-threatening, situations.

Eric Thouvenel's (2010) *Les images de l'eau dans le cinéma français des années 20* (*Images of water in the French cinema of the 1920s*) is very interesting and visionary in the context of reflection upon photogeneity. The author emphasizes that photogeneity as well as—which is worth stressing in Polański's output—the aesthetical dimension of film landscape seen as something far more than a setting (which was obvious for Delluc, L'Herbier and, Flaherty) were born along with images of water in film. Images of aquatic landscapes then became a medium of artistic strategies in films. He notes four procedures in Epstein's works (Thouvenel 2010, 206) which—due to the shots of water and photogenic quality of the landscapes—enable one to understand time and to define cinematic space. The most important measure is slowing down movement by means of waves and making the film time unreal, for example through a blurred image. I would like to pay particular attention to this aspect because of the association of the image of water, of aquatic landscapes, with time: slowing down passing time due to the film images of water. At the same time, it promotes the need to focus on what is here and now in the film, on relations which are at the center of interest of filmmakers such as Polański. Photogeneity is the concept which at first determines certain traits. It points to the beauty of the film image resulting from the impact of technology on nature, whether it be a face or a landscape. The author also highlights the relation between shots of water and the film rhythm; each film is characterized by a kind of liquidity. Therefore, as Thouvenel suggests while slightly generalizing conclusions from his analysis of French *avant-garde* films, it is “a change defined by spatiality, it stresses changes but its structure is always similar ... because each shot is a composition of a certain amount of various photograms, fixed images which create an illusion of movement during a projection” (Thouvenel 2010, 221). In the context of aesthetic and artistic revaluations, this quite obvious conclusion leads to privileging water as an element of the film landscape, due to its nature revealing or strengthening analogies to the very essence of cinema.

Dominique Avron notes that water in its various forms (also as a jellylike substance) appears in all the films Polański made, but it does not possess the dimension of a life-giving power; it is rather linked to murders—it leads to them or constitutes an imitation of death (Avron 1987, 43). Polański's landscape is omnipresent—it is a landscape of apartments, as well as of urban or natural landscapes. If water is part of the landscape, it has a significant meaning and is interesting from an aesthetical perspective which implies perception of images, the sensory presence of a distant and framed world in motion. Our understanding of a film landscape often oscillates between a window and a frame, at the same time, when going beyond this opposition, the landscape becomes an ambivalent subject (Tröhler 2019). There is no natural landscape in film; there cannot be one because cinema itself is a trick—it

is something artificial, created. It is something determined by an artificial frame, yet, at the same time, it suggests the limitlessness of the world beyond the frame. This condition is met by aquatic landscapes in Polański's films mentioned above, where—despite the extraordinary precision of the frame composition, the focus on characters' activities usually present in the frame—owing to the camera work, it seems that there is something more beyond the visible, something vast. Such is the landscape which suggests an important space in which something takes place and which is not shown directly on the screen. Wide shots in which the aquatic landscape dominates—a yacht somewhere in the distance, a man trapped in a car in vast space flooded by high tide, a house being swept by the wind and drenched with heavy rain on an island where one can get lost, and finally the most *cliché* of landscapes—the shots of the sea in *Pirates* where the director juggles iconographic stereotypes of genre cinema, taking up a game with the viewers. Roman Polański perfectly constructs frames by operating the camera in such a way as to capture the actors' mobility, their movements within a frame. He goes beyond the frame yet at the same time applies Carl Dreyer's golden rule (Avron 1987, 75), which claims that the eye gets attached to objects in motion, and it is passive in relation to the still ones. As a result, the viewer's eye follows travelings and other movements within the film image with pleasure. The camera work in Polański's films is at the service not only of the characters but also the construction of landscapes, which are open for the characters. I do not want to use the common formulation that space or landscape is a character on par with human characters; in Polański's films, the landscape simply is and plays an important role both from the point of view of dramatic narrative and aesthetics. Attachment to water as a motif, theme, emotional trigger, or landscape in Polański's works interestingly corresponds with the usage of long shots and travelings which further strengthen the impression of pervasive liquidity and the lability of the world. Moreover, the characters of the discussed films (even "trapped," immobilized) do not remain still for too long. If they talk, they are usually shot from the back, a bit from the side, or a fragment of their back and three quarters of their face is shown (e.g., dialogues on the "Christine," a yacht whose size almost necessitates such shots), which introduces changes of perspectives—a continuous movement within the frame, often powered by the movement of water, waves, surface vibrations, and pouring rain. It seems that Polański's characters are on a continuous journey. However, according to Avron, since his first films, the director has had a particular predilection for maintaining the unity of place and action. Of course, it is not always done in the same way; however, one may get the impression that the characters are "still," in that something comes to them and changes the circumstances of their lives. They are on "an immobile journey" (Avron 1987, 53). Changes occur around them, and they spin around in circles and return to the starting point (*Two Men and a Wardrobe*, *Knife in the Water*, *Frantic*, *Dance of the Vampires*). Photogenic aquatic landscapes strengthen

the sense of change, duration, and the passage of time—due to their paradoxical nature of flow trapped in the film frame. According to James Greenberg, an almost theatrical and artificial frame is seething with emotions owing to proper use of lights, camera movements, and music. Shots are composed as if they were paintings, and the scene where a young character is hanging overboard the yacht and running on the surface of water to the rhythm of jazz music constitutes the quintessence of cinematic movement (Greenberg 2013, 6). The concentration of characters (usually three of them) in a small space is emphasized by the vastness of the landscape in which they are placed and with which they cope. The more open space surrounds the characters, the more the vastness and openness of aquatic landscapes (somewhat paradoxically) strengthens the sense of encirclement and confinement. And the characters being placed on a yacht, a cruise ship, a sinking wreck of a pirate ship, or on an island surrounded by raging water means they cannot get to the open space. It is as if water and a severe landscape featuring dark blue firmament, pouring rain and wind, or swimming sharks trigger the worst in the characters, who are driven to murder, to think about it, or are otherwise entangled in killing somebody through their profession as a gangster (*Cul-de-sac*) or a pirate, an unexplained death (*The Ghost Writer*), settling of scores from the past (*Death and the Maiden*), or lovers' tragic finale during a New Year's cruise (*Bitter Moon*) as well as competing for an eponymous knife—both a cool gadget and a terrifying object.

Not all of the landscapes in Polański's films are photogenic, and they do not appear in all of his films. However, we often deal with such landscapes thanks to single scenes or shots in which the images of still water, barely moving (which makes it even more disturbing) or penetrating the land (*Death and the Maiden*, *Cul-de-sac*, *The Ghost Writer*) are juxtaposed with the images of severe weather conditions: violent wind, heavy rain, or a storm. Photogenic landscapes are also achieved through the use of appropriate shooting techniques: shots from just above the surface of the water (*Knife in the Water*), creating dark dangerous landscapes, often diluting the image with rainfall, mist above the water, or relying on a mirror effect produced with actual mirrors (*Two Men and a Wardrobe*, *Cul-de-sac*) or by means of reflective surfaces such as wet asphalt. Aquatic landscapes, the water enhanced by their photogeneity, make the situations happening in such circumstances distract from reality, and the stories become universal in their meaning. Avron emphasizes the fact that, due to his aquatic landscapes, Polański evokes an atmosphere of growing "spleen and degeneration" (Avron 1987, 123) among his characters. The movement of water, the photogeneity of landscapes, the long shots and camera travels penetrating the space, and the characters trapped in it extend the time of narration/reception. One of the better examples of a premeditated, slow development of the course of events in the landscapes of the North Sea, which clearly determine characters and moods, is *The Ghost Writer*. The director even plays with the audience,

trying the viewers' expectations for a thriller. There are seemingly minor items: a view out a window on a roaring sea, a figure of a gardener who sweeps an outdoor terrace despite the windy weather, characters' slow walks by the sea, or the ghost writer wandering around an empty house are cumulated at a specific time, and the tension continues to grow. There are no partial discharges of emotions. This, of course, is achieved by the director himself and the cinematographer, Paul Edelman, who creates an almost monochromatic color palette. Greenberg notes that the ocean, the dark sand on the beach, and the footpath around the villa are of the same color, a leaden shade of grey. This color corresponds with the dark, low sky, and it seems that the characters are in confined space, even when they are outside the house (Greenberg 2013, 7). This sense is strengthened by placing the film's action in coastal landscapes, determining the relationships between the characters who are stuck with each other in open wide spaces which amazingly limit their activities. Focusing on the presented situations and the precision of the constructed frames, they clearly have the characteristics of "active framing" (Aumont 2008, 116) that escapes confinement within a mobile picture frame which, at the same time, makes the viewer reflect on it and provides time for this reflection. "Photogeneity not only makes us dwell on the image, it even obliges us to look at the image as a place of stoppage," as Louis Merzeau (2003, 206) writes about the nature of photogeneity.

There is one more aspect in Polański's output which is often highlighted by the experts—the presence of mirrors, reflective surfaces which multiply images and characters, and each character seems to be a reflection of another character. Aquatic landscapes actively contribute to this illusion of the mirror due to the nature of water, as Eric Thouvenel (2010) contends by claiming that water should be privileged as a material of filmed reality because of its optical qualities—its sensitivity to changes in light. At the same time, it reveals itself as a light/dark, transparent/opaque, dark/white matter. In the case of Polański's films, all of the listed functions of water seem to apply: water which acts as a mirror coupled with a set of practices involving reflection, creating illusions, and the effect of absorption—characteristic of the director's output. It functions as a screen where, by using a prism, one can see a complex play of light, and it even functions as a metaphorical tomb, where water conveys moving between worlds. The former functions contribute to creating photogeneity and evoke the effect of the photogeneity of an image, yet it is almost a rule that when images of the sea dominate the screen, the characters lose their lives (*Cul-de-sac*, *The Ghost Writer*, *Bitter Moon*) or come into contact with death (*Two Men and a Wardrobe*, *Knife in the Water*, *Pirates*, *Death and the Maiden*). A completely separate aspect is the photogeneity of a face, which is said to be the landscape of the soul. Polański's cinema is a cinema of relationships, of the observation of human characters, hence why close-ups of characters' faces are so crucial—the effect is strengthened by a vast aquatic landscape. On

the one hand, there is the vast landscape of the sea or lake which enhances the impression of isolation, chaos, fear, and the threat posed by the elements; on the other hand, there are close-ups of characters' faces depicting all of their emotions stemming from the situation they find themselves in.

Roman Polański's cinema is—certainly not only due to the photogeneity of its landscapes but also because of its universal stories—“an intelligent and subjective machine,” as the precursor of cinematic photogeneity, Jean Epstein, wished. Polański's consistency when he tends to locate the action of films in aquatic landscapes, or at least when he uses motifs relating to water, creates a type of iconography unique to the artist. His attachment to water makes it an important element even in the cases where water is not exhibited as part of the landscape. For instance, in *Frantic*, in the scenes of the protagonist's wife being kidnapped, the director shows an empty hotel room from the perspective of the protagonist taking a shower. The viewers cannot see what happened to the woman, instead—through the water pouring from the shower—they see a fragment of the bathroom, the room, and the shower cabin door. The shot is as if taken from Hitchcock's films; the tension rises because the viewers are perfectly aware of the fact that they cannot see something important. Suspense in Polański's films is also created by means of aquatic landscapes and seems to be a standard measure. His characters are people in the process of travelling (often in an immobile way) and for both them and the viewers the landscape becomes a trigger for memories that explode in the middle of the water and force them to confront something. However, the characters are often left without an answer, as if it were postponed in endless suspense.

References:

- Aumont, Jacques. 2008. *L'image*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Aumont, Jacques. 2002. *Les théories des cinéastes*. Paris: Nathan.
- Avron, Dominique. 1987. *Roman Polanski*. Paris: Rivages.
- Copik, Ilona. 2017. *Topografie i krajobrazy. Filmowy Śląsk* [Topography and landscapes: Cinematic Silesia]. Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ.
- Dopartowa, Mariola. 2003. *Labirynt Polańskiego* [Polański's labyrinth]. Kraków: Rabid.
- Gardies, Andre. 1999. “Le paysage comme moment narratif.” In *Les paysages du cinéma*, edited by Jean Mottet, 141-153. Seyssel: Champ Vallon.
- Greenberg, James. 2013. *Roman Polanski. A Retrospective*. Bath: Palazzo Editions Ltd.
- Lubelski, Tadeusz. 2000. *Strategie autorskie w polskim filmie fabularnym lat 1945-61* [Creative strategies in Polish popular cinema in the years 1945-61]. Kraków: Rabid.
- Merzeau, Louis. 2003. “De la photogénie.” *Les cahiers de médiologie* 1: 199-206.
- Natali, Maurizia. 1996. *L'image-paysage. Iconologie et cinéma*. Saint Denis: Presse Universitaires de Vincennes.

Barbara Kita

Thouvenel, Eric. 2010. *Les images de l'eau dans le cinéma français des années 20*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Tröhler, Margrit. 2002. "Le paysage au cinéma: l'image, objet ambigu et second peau." *Figurationen: Gender — Literatur — Kultur 2*: 65-80.