

## Photographic portraits in Polish cinema: keepsakes, traces, props<sup>\*</sup>

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Photographs are probably our most cherished mementos or keepsakes, along with letters, memoirs or films. A customised personal product, photograph has a special status that enables material and nonmaterial values to merge. Photos are powerful in that they are autonomous material beings while, depending on the way one looks at a picture or (possibly) touches it, and on the way it is displayed, it gains a wealth of personal, symbolic or metaphorical meanings. As it the case with the other cultural/media techniques, photographs are, in a way, carriers of altered perception. They mould an image of one's body which should not attain fulfilment in the very act of perceptivity alone. The extensive technological capabilities and the potential to merge with other media allow photograph to enter the realm of transdisciplinary theory of image and culture, enabling novel and yet-unknown interpretations. Manifoldly multiplied and computer-modified photographic portraits, in particular, can be read – in a cultural-memory context – as an essential contribution to a historicization of representations of faces in a motion picture, that is, in cinema or computerised animation.

Pictures tend to be kept in embellished boxes, photo albums or computer folders, thus forming a system of closed-ended stories relating to specified individuals of groups that have been captured at the specified time and in the specified space. Photographs have an important role in the complex process of image-formation in the memory and of building human identity.

Fotografia, pamięć unieruchomiona w obrazie ingeruje w żywą pamięć osoby podejmującej trud

A photograph – a piece of memory 'immobilised' or 'inactivated' in an image – intervenes in the mem-

<sup>\*</sup> First printed as "Portrety fotograficzne w filmie polskim: pamiątka, ślad, rekwizyt" in: *Napis* issue 29 (2023), pp. 71–94.

samopoznania. Domagamy się rozpoznania tożsamości własnej i innych na podstawie materialnych dowodów. Dlatego coraz bardziej rozbudowane stają się systemy identyfikacji i klasyfikacji. Zbieramy potwierdzenia, bo już nie dowierzamy jedynie świadectwu naszej intuicji.

ory of the one who makes a self-exploration effort. Each of us demands that their own identity and those of the others be recognised based on material evidence. Hence the increasing extension of identification and classification systems. We collect confirmations, for we no more trust the testimony of our intuitions.<sup>1</sup>

Since the beginning, photography has been approached as a 'mirror of memory'. It is often pretty hard to call into question whatever is represented in a picture, since 'The photograph's memory is incomparably more perfect than a human's memory; it is absolute, permanent and pervasive'.<sup>2</sup> Any preserved photo stands for a technological medium of memory. The mechanism of human memory is comparable to pictures, as any memorised experience and images of individuals or human groups tend to form piles of images whose specific elements surface out of the consciousness or get pushed down to the bottom of the subconscious or unconscious.

Fotografie tworzą własną pamięć obrazów, odwołując się do fotografii i przywołując we wspomnieniach obrazy w obrazach. Przedmiotem tej pamięci może być również – być może jest to nawet reguła – funkcja pamięciowa fotografii jako taka. Pamięć obrazów pokazuje się najwyraźniej w obrazach pamięci. Fotografie stają się nośnikami pamięci. A w obrazach pojawiają się znów obrazy, które odsyłają do obrazów.

Photographs create their own memory of images, one that refers to photography and evokes images-in-images in one's memories. The memorial function of photography as such can also be an object of such memory; this might even be a rule. The memory of images gets most clearly displayed in images of memory. Photographs turn into carriers of memory. In the images, other images appear, which refer one, again, to images.<sup>3</sup>

Each photo is as if an image in the human mind, preserving a clear shape and form of figures, effigies and objects, an array of colours and diverse shades. However, with time, these become increasingly subject to destruction, growing distant, blurred or vague. Photographs get decomposed and thereby 'crumble' the reality into hundreds of fragmented pieces. However, some of the obliterated and broken fragments may create a whole gamut of new images, dissimilar to the archetype. Images in the human mind are like photographs shuffled and selected for an exhibition or an album – they circulate in an unending motion that creates new tiers of memory that are linked by subsequent narrative lines.

1 M. Michałowska, *Obraz utajony. Szkice o fotografii i pamięci* [The latent image. Essays on photography and memory] (Cracow: 2007), p. 47.

2 L. Lechowicz, *Fotografia polska. Wojciech Prażmowski* [Polish photography: Wojciech Prażmowski] (Warsaw: 2000), p. 4.

3 B. Stiegler, *Bilder der Photographie: Ein Album photographischer Metaphern* [Images of photography: An Album of photographic metaphors] [2006]; quoted after the Polish edition: *Obrazy fotografii. Album metafor fotograficznych*, transl. by J. Czudec (Cracow: 2009), p. 163.

Tworzy się bowiem dzięki fotografii sfera sacrum subiektywnego i prywatnego. Subiektywnego, bo odnoszącego się do jednostkowej wyobraźni; prywatnego zaś – bo zawartego w przedmiotach i wytworach posiadających znaczenie ograniczone do terytorium życiowej przestrzeni danego człowieka. To natomiast, co prywatne i subiektywne, znajduje odbicie w świadomości pod postacią obrazów myślowych, czerpiących swe treści z pamięci.

Photograph brings about the formation of a sphere of the sacred, subjective and private one. Subjective it is, as it refers to the individual imagination; private, as it is comprised in objects and products whose meaning or significance is limited to the life-space territory of a given human being. The private and the subjective gets reflected in the consciousness in the form of mental images drawing their contents from the memory.<sup>4</sup>

Looking attentively at a private photographic portrait of his mother, Roland Barthes finds, in his book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, that photograph directly evokes the past in the present. However, evocation of the past time does not mean that it would literally come into being again. By means of photography, a theatre of the past emerges and reveals itself to the recipient, invoking in them a train of associations and facilitating an interpretation of what is now well past. Photograph is a self-contained world; the one who looks at it is supposed to experience the story perpetuated therein.

» What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once (...) In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, (...) the *This* (this photograph, and not Photography), in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuché*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression.<sup>5</sup>

In the process of interpretation, each photograph gains new meanings, whereas in conjunction with other media, such as theatre or motion picture productions, it activates new possibilities of seeing and contemplating. The world that has passed may be evoked by a photograph, a piece of theatre or film. Moreover, merging diverse media and arts (image and theatre, photograph and cinema, painting image and photographic image) and creating by artists of novel stage effects (photographic image within a motion-picture image) are interesting measures indeed.

I herein seek to analyse and interpret the photographs appearing in three Polish movies – namely, *Noce i dnie* [*Nights and Days*], *Polskie drogi* [*The Passions of Poland*] and *Dom* [*The House*]; I present selected photographic portraits of their characters:

4 J. Kurowicki, *Fotografia jako zjawisko estetyczne* [Photography as an aesthetic phenomenon] (Torun: 2020), p. 107.

5 R. Barthes, *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie* [1980], quoted after the English edition: *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, transl. by R. Howard (New York: 1981), p. 4.

Teresa Kocięłło and Bogumił Niechcic, Władysław Niwiński, Barbara Lawinówna, and Łukasz Zbożny. Owing to motion pictures, these portraits have been placed in different times and spaces. This has made them a significant motif in the intimate microworld of the protagonists, whilst letting them appear against a panorama of historical events.

‘The cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world. This is why, very early on, it looked for bigger and bigger circuits which would unite an actual image with recollection-images, dream-images and world-images’, Gilles Deleuze writes.<sup>6</sup> The photographic portraits in the abovementioned films have created an interesting effect for the construction of the work – namely, ‘an image within the image’ or, to be more precise, ‘a photograph in the movie’. Such a measure leads to a doubling of the motion-picture reality: as a result, the viewer watches the film *and* the process of reception of the photograph, shown by the characters who are observers in the movie. In this way, a double communication is activated – the one between the fictitious characters within the setting or the diegetic world, and the one involving the movie stage and the viewers. Making the photographic portraits part of the plot implies a multiplication of the movie sets while also emphasising the simultaneousness of the processes of creation and reception. In the way *Noce i dnie*, *Polskie drogi* and *Dom* are structured, alongside the ‘photograph in the movie’ effect, all the pictures connect more perspectives of photographic art, including typology (private, personal, familial), association with/relatedness to historical events (*Noce i dnie*: the outbreak of World War 1; *Polskie drogi*: World War 2; *Dom*: the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and the postwar reconstruction of Warsaw) as well as the colour aesthetics reduced to black-and-white.

On the one hand, this choice is a historical projection of technological possibilities, as the prewar and early postwar photography was maintained in a black-and-white tonality; on the other hand, the assumed colour aesthetics excellently fits the purpose of depicting a dichotomic nature of the world and indicating the mutually contradicting values, such as life and death. Nonetheless, in the course of the narrative and in the construction of the cause-and-effect arrangement, significant differences appear: the photographic portraits of Teresa Kocięłło and Bogumił Niechcic activate, through the evoked memories, the past occurrences only. The portrait of Władysław Niwiński causes the plot to halt in order to reveal the present mechanisms of human behaviours and conducts in the face of war, whereas the photos of Barbara Lawinówna and Łukasz Zbożny contribute to a rapid switch of future events. The photographs in question will now be analysed in terms

6 G. Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'Image-temps* [1985], quoted after the English edition: *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, transl. by H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta (Minneapolis: 1997), p. 68.

of psychology of memoirs and cultural tradition (photograph as a keepsake in *Noce i dnie*), criminology (photograph as a trace in *Polskie drogi*) or therapeutics (photograph as a prop in *Dom*).

### PHOTOGRAPH-KEEPSAKE

*Noce i dnie*,<sup>7</sup> the film based on the saga novel by Maria Dąbrowska, portraying the story of the Niechcic family at the turn of the twentieth century, features a set of carefully designed costumes, carefully arranged manor and tenement-house interiors, and well thought-over and precise picturing of urban and rural landscapes relative to the changing seasons, historical events and moral and customs-related transitions. Many shots and takes showing the manors in Krępa, Serbinów or Pamiętów and tenement houses in Kaliniec display care about preservation of the landowner and bourgeois traditions related to amassing, saving and exposing of patriotic and family mementos and keepsakes. On the walls of the salons or dining rooms, in particular, painting or photographic portraits are visible of the deceased members of the family or the closest living relatives. For Barbara Niechcic, who is the central character, the effigies of her relatives displayed in certain scenes – the painting miniature of her little boy Piotruś and the photographs of her sister Teresa and her husband Bogumił – are precious mementos that help solidify and preserve the memory of those now-absent. All and any such mementos/keepsakes build up a world ‘owing to the memory that out of material relics constructs, in a voluntary and arbitrary manner, a nostalgic past’.<sup>8</sup> As Anna Wieczorkiewicz emphasises, ‘A keepsake, the splinter of the past, brings about associations with an earlier state, free of present-day contaminations; for instance, with the childhood (...) it relates to the biographical events of its holder’.<sup>9</sup>

The memoirs perpetuated in a material form, ‘splinters of the past’, repeatedly scar Barbara as she over and over again looks at the portraits of her son, sister and husband. In the course of her relocation from Serbinów to the estate of Pamiętów, she would look through all the chests, trunks and coffins, and place various family keepsakes and heirlooms on the table. She finds in one of the boxes a miniature of her dead son, Piotruś Niechcic. The effigy in an oval frame features a little boy’s head, at which Barbara looks fondly and with affection, to notice somewhat later

7 *Noce i dnie* [*Days and Nights*]: Polish television series, premiered 26<sup>th</sup> February 1978; written and directed by Jerzy Antczak, music by Waldemar Kazanecki, director of photography Stanisław Loth, set design by Jerzy Masłowski.

8 A. Wieczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty. O doświadczaniu świata w podróży* [A tourist’s appetite: experiencing the world through travel] (Cracow: 2008), p. 45.

9 Ibidem.

that the portrait is broken. She gently slips her finger inside, bends out the scraps of paper and tries to smoothen the entire surface and put together the rolled-up edges. The picture of the little boy is broken and hurts the mother. A painful, never-healing wound has occurred between the motherly love and Piotrus's sudden death; now, it is epitomised by the portrait – an 'open wound'.

Być może samo wejście w szczelinę, samo zaistnienie w niej jest najwłaściwszą odpowiedzią na skierowane ku nam wezwanie. Gdy wsuwamy się w ukrytą rzeczywistość, która przyjmuje nas, a zarazem osłania, być może nie musimy niczego poznawać, być może wystarczy istnieć w miejscu, do którego należymy, które jak gdyby zezwala na to, aby być naszym miejscem przez pewien czas.

The entry into the crack, the very springing-into-being inside it is, perhaps, the most adequate reply to the call targeted at us. When we slip into a hidden reality, which accepts us and, simultaneously, shields us, we might do not have to cognise anything: it should perhaps suffice that we exist in the place we belong to, and which as if admits to be our place for some time.<sup>10</sup>

Barbara unveils a real 'crack' in the portrait, whilst her tender gesture of touching the boy's painted face gives the impression of communing with a living child. An ever-widening crack has cropped up between this protagonist's yearning-for-order mind and the bitter experience of her senses. The crack's edges unceasingly drift apart. An aesthetic experience stems from this very crack, which brings about an illusion of suspension between the worlds. The recollection of her son pushes Barbara, over and over, to connect the two worlds – the one of the living and the one of the dead. In spite of the passing time, the mother is still working through her mourning. The absent child is made present through the painted effigy and revived thanks to the images stored in her memory.

The movie in question shows artistic, technological as well as moral/customs-related transformations occurring at the turn of the twentieth century, through the prism of diverse painting and photographic portraits. It is worth recalling that miniature painting was en vogue from the fifteenth until the nineteenth century. Miniature portraits functioned as valuable gifts and family mementos. However, the spread, since the nineteenth century, of daguerrotype technology and various photographic techniques caused that this form of artistry was eventually squeezed out: the capturing of image understood as a keepsake or heirloom was thenceforth the job of photographic portrait. No surprise, then, that the walls of landowner manors and tenement-house drawing rooms shown in *Noce i dnie*, display miniatures as well as photographs are objects of collecting. 'By some measures, they resemble museum exhibits: both miniatures and photographs are signs that refer us to something beyond their material form and evoke narratives, not infrequently quite extensive ones'.<sup>11</sup>

10 J. Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia* [Cracks of existence] (Warsaw: 1992), p. 178.

11 A. Wiczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty...*, p. 44.

The value of a photograph as a keepsake is determinable based on 'the fondness felt by its recipient',<sup>12</sup> rather than a material value of the carrier. A distrust toward the visual world is thereby manifested, and toward the elusiveness and transience of memories. Our memory works, after all, not merely through images but basically through the testimonies of other senses, chiefly tastes and odours. In his *Vergeetboek* – 'book of forgetting/oblivion' – Douwe Draaisma refers to a collection of objects such as portraits, photographs, strands of hair, letters, and the like, that function as 'material means of reinforcing the memory'.<sup>13</sup> These emotionally imbued objects allow our mind to activate more reminiscences.

There is a scene in *Noce i dzień* where, after the death of her beloved sister Teresa Kocięło, Barbara Niechcic inherits a trunk with letters. As she reads them in the evening, not only shared images of family life get recaptured but also the before-unknown vicissitudes of her sister become gradually discovered. Barbara learns from some fragments and notes how unhappy Teresa was in her marriage with Lucjan whilst in parallel hiding and cherishing her love for another man. The final scene of the second episode, entitled *Piotruś i Teresa*, features Barbara looking at her sister's photograph placed on the gravestone. The young woman's face perpetuated in the photo seems to be lasting beyond time – in an eternal 'now', where the past, present and future time are all in a state of temporal concentration. The photograph recalls a dead reflection of a person enchanted in a perspective of the eternal. Teresa's motionless and tacit face freezes with a subtle half-smile on her lips.

» All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.<sup>14</sup>

As a material object, photography records and preserves life and reminds one of the perspective of death; attached to the tombstone's column, it depicts the petrification of the prematurely deceased Teresa. Keeping up the appearances of eternity, the photograph paradoxically testifies to a gradual distancing, destruction and, finally, decay. Graveyard photography can be regarded, after all, as an object that attests to a limbo between life and death. As Hans Belting notices, it is cemetery photographs that

12 M. Michałowska, *Przewrotne przyjemności obrazu. Eseje o fotografii w kulturze popularnej* [The perverse pleasures of the image: essays on photography in popular culture] (Gdańsk: 2020), p. 87.

13 D. Draaisma, *Vergeetboek* [2010], quoted after idem, *Forgetting. Myths, perils and compensations*, transl. by L. Waters (New Haven and London: 2017), p. 228.

14 S. Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: 1977), p. 11.

» continue the tradition of funerary images, very much in the old sense. Looking out at us is a living person, whose picture is a part of his grave. (...) A picture lays claim to its specific aura at the intersection of life and death. But only death invests our memory with the fundamental meaning that once called images into life.<sup>15</sup>

The photograph carries and implies the sensation of closeness of the demised sister. It is through the picture that Barbara simultaneously experiences both absence and presence, which is connected with an incessant experience of longing and relief. As Belting stresses, the truth of the archetype of each image or picture relates to the replacement of the dead person with his or her likeness: 'An image cannot die, and therefore lends permanence to the mortal body'.<sup>16</sup> It has to be borne in mind that bringing the portrayed person to a standstill remains an attribute of any photograph; such a manner of preserving the person's image refers us to an anthropological concept of portrait as a death mask. Teresa's photographed face does resemble a mask – a dissected, artificial one; its only living element is her focused glance, which Barbara senses intuitively and so turns her head off immediately toward the cemetery lane. This is how she discovers the secret of her sister's life and recognises the addressee of the letters – the young Tadeusz Krępski. The photograph serves as a reference to the epistolary notes and thereby reinforces its memorial quality: the history of Teresa and Tadeusz's relationship is definitely over, and yet remains stored in the memory of the living clued-in persons: Teresa's unobtrusive sister and her once-loved man, loyal and devoted even after her death.

The most highlighted photograph in *Noce i dnie* is, however, the enlarged portrait of Bogumił Niechcic. At the decline of her life, Barbara, now a widow, returns to Kaliniec and settled in a fairly small apartment in a tenement house situated at the market square. Every day, looking at her husband's picture, she monologues or dialogues with her maid ('Harvest is on now, there in Serbinów'; 'Bogumił would be concerned about it') and recalls scenes from their family life – playing with their children, the husband strolling down a muddy lane, their working in the field together and their daily bustle in and around the manor. The shooting camera enlarges the portrait and one gets the impression that Bogumił is still there, the host and houselord. For 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence';<sup>17</sup> 'the Photograph

15 H. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* [2003], quoted after the English edition: *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, transl. by T. Dunlap (Princeton and Oxford: 2011), p. 123.

16 Ibidem, p. 156.

17 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida...*, p. 87.



is a certain but fugitive testimony'.<sup>18</sup> The husband's photographic portrait is a sort of medium through which a series of the wife's reminiscences begin to reveal themselves. The picture evokes images from the past which have the potential to activate different emotional states in that woman – anxiety, disillusion, languor. Preserved in the photographic image, the figure of Niechcic enables the encounter with the past world, the return to the time that was once present. Bogumił's portrait renders 'what has been'<sup>19</sup> present anew.

Her dead husband's photographic portrait, her dramatic flight from Kaliniec as the town is on fire, and her watching the tragical scenes following the outbreak of the Great War make Barbara's memory progressively awakened, with reminiscences evoking one another. Her drifting toward what is past is, therefore, not merely a flee from the present reality but a deliberate decision whose primary aim is to attain self-knowledge. Barbara looks back at herself and the others in order to rediscover the sense of the past and lost world. The images getting arranged in her mind by means of film editing create colour photographs, shuffled and selected for an exhibition or album, in constant movement of building new tiers of memory, linked by the consecutively emerging narrative lines. Photography becomes open to itself, and thereby, to the primeval and immemorial: an ever-renewing presence subjected to amnesia and to the process of oblivion. In the course of her trip with Szymaszel, a coachman, Barbara spins an internal monologue, recollecting thus:

Na ścianie wisiała powiększona fotografia Bogumiła. Fotografie dzieci chwyciłam w ostatniej chwili. A o Bogumile zapomniałam. Nawet teraz o nim zapomniałam. Boże litościwy, gdyby ten bieg dziejów, co ruszył z posad, mógł nagle stanąć i ocalić fotografię Bogumiła. Ale czy ja sama... Czy ja, nie fotografia, ja żywy człowiek... Nie byłam raz na zawsze przez kogoś zapomniana?

An enlarged photo of Bogumił hanged there on the wall. The portraits of the kids I grabbed last-minute. Forgot Bogumił! Even now, I've just forgotten. O merciful God! May this course of history that's just moved forward halt, all of a sudden, as save Bogumił's photograph! But, how about myself... Haven't I, not a picture – me, the living person... Haven't I ever been forgotten by someone, once and for all?<sup>20</sup>

18 Ibidem, p. 93.

19 Ibidem, p. 93 ['what has been'].

20 Excerpt from Barbara Niechcic's interior monologue in the film; cf. <https://cyfrowa.tvp.pl/video/noce-i-dnie,odc-12-a-potem-nastapi-noc,68654957> [accessed 3 September 2023] (or any downloadable English-subtitles version). The novel offers a third-person narrative account: 'Pani Barbarze zrobiło się nagle zimno, a potem gorąco. Uprzytomniła sobie, że na ścianie w jej pokoju została powiększona fotografia Bogumiła. Fotografie dzieci, stojące na komodzie, chwyciła i w ostatniej chwili włożyła do walizki, a o Bogumile zapomniała. Przez mgnienie gotowa była zaniechać wszelkiej podróży, lecieć z powrotem do tej ściany, ale ta ściana pewno już chwije się, pali, pewno już leży w gruzach! Pragnęła – to, by cały bieg dziejów, co z hukiem ruszyły z posad, wstrzymał się, stanął na chwilę i ocalił tę fotografię, to przeciwnie – by zawrzał jeszcze większym zamętem. Ach, po cóż ta cisza, ta pogoda na drodze? Niech wszędzie grzmi, niech wszystko się zdruzgotuje, aby wśród burzy niczym się stało to jej nielitościwe zapomnienie. Nielitościwe?! A czyż ona sama, nie fotografia, ale żywy człowiek, nie była kiedyś stokroć srożej raz na zawsze przez kogoś zapomniana? – szarpnęło się

In the movie, the plot runs simultaneously: when Barbara runs away, seeking refuge from one manor to another, her own dwelling is being consumed by fire, with the 'enlarged' portrait of Bogumił inside it. The central female character is losing a precious and valuable keepsake, and this for two reasons: first, she has not managed to take it with her – this on the level of physical reaction; and, it was not as priceless a thing as the photos of their children – this on the level of psychological reaction. Second, the twist of fate – the wartime fire – deprives her, forever, of the portrait of her husband. All photographs are condemned to bleaching, fading, scraping, blurring and destruction, soiling and cracking, rotting and charring. However, even these phenomena have a specific aesthetic charm, inspiring the viewer to differently perceive the image and philosophise. The aesthetic value of photographs ensues from a specific transformation owing to the action of time and space. In the film scene, the photograph is yellowed; a coat of dust has settled on the ornamental sculpted rectangular frame, which Barbara is now gently brushing off with her fingertips. With time, the effigy of Bogumił 'will be done away with, along with this photograph which yellows, fades, and will someday be thrown out'.<sup>21</sup> The flames which are reflected on the surface of the photograph's glass, render us aware of that a process occurs in the wife of releasing herself from her deceased husband. These flames symbolically appropriate him and cut him off Barbara, who had never been courageous enough to leave Bogumił. The intense flame annihilates

w niej coś ni stąd, ni zowąd. Bogumił nie był zresztą małostkowy ani sentymentalny i nie szłoby mu o to, by w takiej chwili pamiętano o jego fotografii. I ujrzała go przy sobie niby żywego, śmiejącego się i mówiącego: – Nie martw się, czemuż ty się taką bląhostką martwisz? – A tak dźwignął ją raz jeszcze i pocieszył, a wnet przypomniało jej się, że zostawiła także wazonik z majolikowym strzelcem, pamiątkę po matce, i wydało jej się, że Bogumił na fotografii nie jest już taki sam wśród płomieni' ['Barbara got cold all of a sudden, and then felt warm. She realised that the enlarged photograph of Bogumił had been left on the wall of her room. She had grabbed the photos of their children, sitting on the chest-of-drawers, and put them into the suitcase at the very last moment, but forgot the Bogumił one. For an eyeblink, she got ready to abandon any travelling and rush backwards toward that wall; but the wall must be wobbling now, embraced with fire – sure it's lying in ruins! She desired so much that the whole course of history that has rushed forward so blusteringly, hold off, half for a while and save that photograph; but then again, she wanted it to rage with an even greater disruption. Ah, what's that silence, that nice weather along the road, for? May it thunder and rumble all over, may every single thing get crushed, so that her merciless omission become nothing amidst the tempest. Merciless, huh?! And what about her – not the photograph but the living human being? Hasn't she ever been forgotten by anyone, in a hundredfold sterner manner, sometime, once and for all? – something ripped inside her, without rhyme or reason. After all, Bogumił had never been petty-minded or sentimental, and wouldn't seek that his photo be kept in mind in such a moment. And, she saw him right beside her, as if a living man, laughing and saying, "Don't you worry, come on; why are you bothering yourself with such a trifle?" And thus, he lifted her up once again and consoled her, and then she suddenly remembered that she'd also left the tiny vase with a maiolica fusilier, a memento of her mother; and it seemed to her that Bogumił in the photograph is no more the same man, amidst those flames.'] [Quotation in English is based on the Polish edition: M. Dąbrowska, *Noce i dnie*, vol. 3 (Warsaw: 2003), p. 373].

21 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*..., p. 94.

the past and the traces of presence of someone who is about to turn into a handful of ashes. A photographic portrait is nothing beyond an incinerated piece of paper, which is nonetheless a significant crumb of human existence. The gradual destruction of the portrait initiates the process of incinerating the man's image in Barbara's memory. It is, perhaps, a retaliatory and grief-imbuéd reaction ('Haven't I ever been forgotten by someone?'), or an attempt at excusing oneself ('May this course of history that's just moved forward halt, all of a sudden, as save Bogumił's photograph!'). From the standpoint of historical change, the photo at the Kaliniec dwelling forms a compositional framework for the film, as it spans from the January Insurrection of 1863–4 up to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

The scene featuring the burning photograph of Bogumił evokes in the viewer's consciousness yet another scene with the motif of flames around a male figure. The references in the *Noce i dnie* movie to the complex symbolism of fire serve to depict the emotional relations between a woman and a man. The bright and smooth streaks of candle-flames in the ballroom and amidst the wedding-party guests after the nuptials of Michalina and Daniel Ostrzeński are a figurative metaphor depicting the burning feeling of love that radiates in the hearts. As Octavio Paz points out, 'The original, primordial fire, sexuality, raises the red flame of eroticism, and this in turn raises and feeds another flame, tremulous and blue: the flame of love. Eroticism and love: the double flame of life'.<sup>22</sup> Barbara, a gleaming and joyful maiden, is illuminated by the beams of light out of the candle-flames dancing on the candle-holders. Amidst the bright winding glimmers and subtle streak of shadows, she looks for a loving glance from her then-loved one, Józef Toliboski. The two scenes featuring the fire motif can be referred to the symbolism of element: the fidgety flames with the curls of grey smoke, caused by the consumption of the photographic material, imply that the image suggests the process of transmutation of matter – of destruction and death, whereas the pure candle-flames in the ballroom are the source of light – of creation and love. The photographic portrait – the material carrier of memory – has been completely destroyed: Bogumił the man has burned down in Barbara's memory, just like the photograph, whereas the image preserved in her heart – the effigy of Józef, saved for lifetime – proves undestroyable and perpetual.

All in all, the familial photographs featured in the film under discussion only impersonate an apparent unity of the family, and express the affectionate bonds in a substitutive fashion. Instead of real contacts and direct interpersonal ties and relationships, portraits appear framed in oval or rectangular frames. The family

22 O. Paz, *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*, transl. by H. Lane (New York, San Diego and London: 1995), p. 13.

community turns into a photographic community, whereas 'each photograph always contains this imperious sign of (...) future death'.<sup>23</sup>

## PHOTOGRAPH-TRACE

Photographic portraits as one of the motifs appearing across film genres appear, for instance, in documentaries<sup>24</sup> and war movies. Sometimes, a photograph has an episodic function; elsewhere, however – as in *Polskie drogi*<sup>25</sup> – it may contribute to how the plot and the characters' vicissitudes develop. Małgorzata Hendrykowska has come to the following conclusion:

najlepsze zbiorowe portrety pokolenia, którego młodość przypadła na lata wojny, powstały [...] w ramach serialowej produkcji telewizyjnej. [...] Szeroką panoramę polskich losów stworzył także [...] jedenastoodcinkowy serial Janusza Morgensterna *Polskie drogi* [...]. Twórcom udało się w przejmującej, wielowątkowej opowieści, z kilkoma bohaterami pierwszoplanowymi, poprowadzić widza przez różne środowiska społeczne, reprezentujące odmienne postawy wobec walki zbrojnej, konspiracji, wojennej ofiary i woli przetrwania. Dwójka głównych bohaterów to wywodzący się ze środowiska inteligenckiego wrześnieiowy podchorąży Władysław Niwiński i jego podwładny z Września kapral Leon Kuraś, z pozoru sprytny i zaradny warszawski cwaniak, który w dramatycznych chwilach okazuje się człowiekiem wielkiej szlachetności. To on ukryje żydowską dziewczynkę, a na odnalezienie jej poświęci cały zgromadzony w czasie okupacji majątek i ostatecznie życie. Do fabuły filmu zostały wprowadzone także autentyczne dramatyczne wydarzenia z lat okupacji, między innymi: aresztowanie profesorów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w Krakowie, masowe egzekucje w Wawrze i Pal-

the best collective portraits of the generation whose youth fell during the war years were created (...) as part of some television series (...). A broad panorama of the Polish experiences is presented, for instance (...), in Janusz Morgenstern's eleven-episode series *Polskie drogi* (...). This poignant multi-thread story, featuring several lead characters, guides the viewer through diverse social circles representing different attitudes toward armed struggle, conspiracy, wartime sacrifice and the will to survive. One of the two main protagonists is Władysław Niwiński, an intelligentsia-bred officer cadet in September 1939, the other one being his Defensive War subordinate Leon Kuraś, apparently a clever and resourceful Warsaw smartass, who in dramatic moments turns out to be quite an upstanding and sporting man. It is him who would hide a Jewish girl; to find her afterwards, he is ready to sacrifice the whole property he has amassed during the German occupation and, eventually, his own life. Intertwined in the plot are the real dramatic events from the occupation period, such as the arrest of Cracow's Jagiellonian University professors [i.e. the Sonderaktion Krakau of 6<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1939], the mass

23 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida...*, p. 97.

24 Photographic portraits during the war years are the subject of one documentary: 'Photography was the life passion also for Wilhelm Brasse. In Katowice, where he was active, his beautiful intimate portraits were well known. He was brought to Auschwitz in one of the first transports. There, he was ordered by the SS to keep the photographic documentation of the camp life – the officers' private social meetings, the inmates' labour, the medical experiments. His main task, though, was to make police portraits of those being brought to the camp. Wilhelm Brasse talks about all this, and particularly on a few chosen photos, in Ireneusz Dobrowolski's film *Portrecista* [The Portraitist; 2005]. He talks about human fear, the faces he remembered and which are still haunting him at night, and puts it straight that he made not a single photograph after the war' (M. Hendrykowska, *Film polski wobec wojny i okupacji. Tematy, motywy, pytania* [The Polish film facing the war and occupation: themes, motifs and questions] (Poznań: 2011), p. 26).

25 *Polskie drogi* [The Passions of Poland]: Polish television series, premiered 16<sup>th</sup> October 1977; directed by Janusz Morgenstern. Episode 1 written by Bohdan Czeszko, the other Episodes written by Jerzy Janicki, music by Andrzej Kurylewicz, directors of photography Edward Kłosiński and Witold Adamek, set design by Jerzy Śnieżawski, Wojciech Majda and Teresa Barska.

mirach pod Warszawą, organizacja obozu koncentracyjnego w Oświęcimiu, pacyfikacje Zamojszczyzny, powstanie w getcie warszawskim [1943] i codzienne życie Warszawy wraz z ulicznymi łapankami i egzekucjami.

executions in Wawer and Palmiry near Warsaw, the organising of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Oświęcim, the pacifications in Zamość region, the [1943] Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto and Warsaw's everyday life, with street roundups and executions.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the drastically worsened living conditions during the wartime period, Polish society struggled to survive; this is why people tended to change jobs, workplaces and personal documents. We can see in the film how small businesses functioned, rendering services for Polish and German customers alike: bakeries and confectioneries, dry cleaners' shops and funeral parlours, antique shops and printeries, shoe-repair shops and photographic studios. Each of these places might obviously have had an additional function such as providing refuge to a number of wanted people, safekeeping valuable documents, or serving as excellent camouflage for conspiracy activities. However, each institution and each small establishment were subject to strict control, even the slightest irregularity, if detected, could lead to a death penalty. The series in question moreover shows the unique significance of photography in German-occupied Poland. In his considerations on the history of photography, Ignacy Płazewski remarks that

Fotografia polska skupiła się głównie na terenie Generalnej Guberni i jej życie zaczęło płynąć dwoma nurtami. Nurt jawny stanowiła fotografia użytkowa. Na okupowanych terenach Polski, szczególnie w Generalnej Guberni, przez cały czas wojny zaopatrzenie w materiały fotograficzne było bowiem nie najgorsze. [...] Drugi nurt stanowiła fotografia, która przeszła do podziemia i nierozłącznie wiązała się z konspiracją. To ona reprodukowała mapy dla oddziałów partyzanckich, fotograficznie powieliała regulaminy i instrukcje wojskowe, jak również zakazane książki [...], robiła zdjęcia dla doraźnych potrzeb toczącej się walki, do fikcyjnych dowodów i legitymacji, a także przechowywała i powieliała zdjęcia okupantów, fotografujących akty terroru, egzekucje i obozy śmierci [...].

Polish photography was mainly concentrated in the Generalgouvernement territory; its life flowed along two currents, of which the open one was applied or commercial photography. In the occupied areas of Poland, particularly within the GG, supplies of photographic materials remained fairly steady over the wartime period. (...) The other current consisted of clandestine photographic activity that has associated itself with the underground movement, reproducing maps for partisan troops, photomechanically duplicating military regulations and instructions as well as banned books (...), making photos for immediate needs of the ongoing struggle, fake cards and IDs, keeping and reproducing occupier-made photos of acts of terror, executions or death camps (...).<sup>27</sup>

In *Polskie drogi*, the currents of applied photography and conspiracy-related photography weave additional threads and cause the biographies of several characters to entwine. During the September 1939 defensive campaign, the platoon commanded by Władysław Niwiński gets decimated by a diversionary group led by Johann Heimann, son of a German colonist – a miller, who suddenly dies in the course of the struggle. Wladek and Johann had known each other before the

26 M. Hendrykowska, *Film polski* ..., p. 40.

27 I. Płazewski, *Spojrzenie w przeszłość polskiej fotografii* [Looking into the past of Polish photography] (Warsaw: 1982), pp. 373–374.

war and used to spend holiday together. The outbreak of the war has regrettably turned the former friends into enemies; for the worse, Johann burdens Wladek with the guilt for his father's death and thus vows revenge. Both the Gestapo man and his mother persistently look for traces of the Niwiński family. Władysław, a young officer cadet, changes his place of residence and strives to alter his identity. He needs a photo portrait for his new identity documents, so he visits a studio located at Grodzka Street in Cracow. The firm is run by Tadeusz Białas, together with his daughter Barbara; apart from photographs made on his customers' demand, Tadeusz develops his passion for artistic photography. Along with portraits displayed on his studio's walls, he would hang a framed photomontage showing the Cracow Cloth Hall watched by an enlarged pair of eyes, suggesting an illusion of reflection. The assemblage of these pictures can be seen as indication of a record of the reality – the eyes being identifiable as the sight organ of the photographer who records the reality with use of the camera and looks at the world as a collection of pictures and captures intriguing frames out of the everyday realities. A telling title, 'The city's asleep whilst I'm looking for you', is fixed on the surface. The photomontage is a metaphor of the omniscient and controlling human eye and still camera. This double perspective of vision and seeing refers one to the present-day events whilst also foreshadowing those to come: Wladek is, and will be, under incessant surveillance by the Gestapo. His ordinary visit at the studio sets in motion a series of unexpected and dangerous occurrences. Infatuated by the mysterious handsome stranger, the photographer's daughter makes his photographic portrait and carelessly places it in the window advertising her father's studio. The portrait is a tenderness-imbued trace of Wladek's presence: his apparition is so close to Basia's (Barbara's) heart. This photograph enables introduction of a love-affair thread, which

dotatkowo wzmacnia dramatyzm wojennej i okupacyjnej rzeczywistości. [...] Filmowe obrazy wojennej miłości odsłaniają wszystkie jej odcienie, a napięcie między światem ludzi zakochanych a otaczającą ich wojenno-okupacyjną rzeczywistością służy nie tylko wydobyciu jej okrucieństwa. Pozwala także wyzwolić szereg znaczeń o charakterze symbolicznym i uniwersalnym.

additionally reinforces the dramatic nature of the occupation-time realities. (...) The film's images of a wartime love story reveal all its shades; the tension between the world of those in love and the war-and-occupation reality surrounding them enables to highlight the cruel nature of the latter and, moreover, to release a series of symbolical and universal meanings.<sup>28</sup>

A sentimental memento functions simultaneously as an object comprising a particle of a loved person. When taking the photograph, the girl strives to grasp the young man's image and somehow makes an attempt to 'attach' him to herself. A similar meaning of photograph was expressed, in 1843, by Elizabeth Barrett:

28 M. Hendrykowska, *Film polski...*, p. 91.

» I long to have such a memorial of every being dear to me in the world. It is not merely the likeness which is precious in such cases – but the association and the sense of nearness involved in the thing...the fact of the very shadow of the person lying there fixed forever! It is the very sanctification of portraits I think – and it is not at all monstrous in me to say, what my brothers cry out against so vehemently, that I would rather have such a memorial of one I dearly loved, than the noblest artist's work ever produced.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, the function of photography in *Polskie drogi* consists not only in a preservation of the effigy of a loved person but also in that it enables to evoke a situation in which the war's cruelty is documented. Tadeusz's portrait displays an unusual motive power as it influences the histories of many a person. Photograph is apparently a film reversed, as it freezes the scene whereas motion picture sets it in motion. It is, however, the girl in her role as the photographer that has directed a tragic train of events: it is precisely because of that photograph that her father gets arrested and transported to a camp, while she has to leave her home and stay with her paternal uncle. Walking down the streets of Cracow, the young Heimann recognises the photo of Niwiński displayed in the glass display-case. The portrait has revealed and confirmed the presence of a man he had been seeking since long. It is the 'photographic traces' left by Wladek at the studio that the Gestapo agent tries to follow in order to reach and arrest him. As François Soulages claims, 'a photograph is a trace'.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, an important issue appears which is related not only to the photographing subject and the object being photographed but also the situation in which the picture has been taken, be it by chance or deliberately. The essence of photography has to do with the act of its development – the evocation of the past events. Watched in the movie, the photograph enables to follow the traces of the painful past which is shown through various scenes and ways of creating diverse stories.

Niwiński's photographic portrait became the reason of a disturbing interrogation of Białas, the old man. The Gestapo officer knows the order number and the receipt date of the set of photographs. It is with a triumphant expression that he look-

29 Elizabeth Barrett, in a 1843 letter to Mary Russell Mitford, as quoted in: S. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 143.

30 F. Soulages, *Esthétique de la photographie* [1998] (Paris: 2005), p. 5 ('La photographie est une trace'). This author goes on to say, 'A photograph is a trace, which is why it is poetic. The photographer is the one who must leave, or rather, who must create traces of his passage and of the passage of phenomena, traces of his – photographic – encounter with phenomena' (cf. <https://christiancazenave.fr/en/page-45636-notes-on-file-1>).

ing at the photos and then throws them on the desk top, like playing cards. This deal of the deck of black-and-white photographs foreshadows a gameplay to the death. Yet, Heimann is waiting in vain for Władek to come, as it is Justyna, a professor's daughter, who comes to take the pictures. The studio's owner swaps out the photos, puts down a warning note on the verso and destroys the order number. Białas is gradually getting used to the presence of a man in the German uniform and repeatedly goes out to the darkroom, which is where he can quieten down and get 'initiated'. As a metaphor, the darkroom lets the viewer figure out the process of getting to know about those embrangled in the investigation: the victims, the criminals and the investigators – just like in a crime or action movie.

A complicated function, similar to that in *Polskie drogi*, is ascribed to photograph in Winfried Georg Sebald's novel *Austerlitz*. For the film's photographer as well as for the novel's character, photographing works as a confirmation of one's own existence. Of relevance is the act of gradual extraction of the image one has created:

» In my photographic work I was always especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try to cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long.<sup>31</sup>

The technical procedure carried out in the darkroom can be related to the scene in *Polskie drogi*: the work on the photographs helps the aged photographer become aware of his situational helplessness, overcome his apprehension and resolves to outwit Heimann.

The portrait of Niwiński is for the photographer a source of endangerment tantamount to a judgement of death, whereas the swapped picture warrants that his two customers, Władek and Justyna, would be saved – along with his daughter Barbara, above all. Heimann, however, spots this agile replacement of the photos and order numbers; the studio's owner gets arrested and no trace of him is left. The portrait of Władysław Niwiński was to serve as a manifestation of the young girl's artistic and practical skills, but it turned out to be a disastrous trace. The photograph in *Polskie drogi* was suspended between life and death, between motion and immobility, like an exhibit seen in a museum. As Charlotte Cotton aptly notices, 'It is important not to think of (...) photography's affinity to figurative painting as simply one of mimicry or revivalism; instead, it demonstrates a shared understand-

31 W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* [2001], quoted after the English version: *Austerlitz*, transl. by A. Bell (New York: 2001), p. 77.



ing of how a scene can be choreographed for the viewer so that he or she can recognize that a story is being told'.<sup>32</sup> In the movie scene, the way of encountering the portrait-object suggests an intimacy of experiencing of both the photographing person and the viewer. It is uniqueness, referring one to experience and emotion, that becomes essential; and so is the display value, in terms of the photos' arrangement in the window.

It has to be borne in mind that the *Polskie drogi* TV series shows photographs in a private/personal and historical (underground activities) perspective. The photographic portrait intertwines for some time the lives of the characters – Białas's daughter and Niwiński. It is thanks to Basia that Władek quite quickly gets initiated into the secrets of the art of photography. It is a special task for him, as he is supposed to make documentary photographs to record the extension and redevelopment of the Auschwitz camp. Unfortunately, when making these photos, he is spotted by German guards, which makes him wanted again. However, the maid employed at a German physician's house, named Helena, helps him to flee and cover up the tracks of his photos: he places the negative in an oven and bury it under ash. Rather than resuming a photographing activity, Władek would join armed struggle; photography, the activity that initially merged his fate with that of Basia, finally splits them apart. The investigating SS officer shows ID photos of Niwiński, at which point miss Białas realises that Władek has managed to escape the German pursuers, understanding that they have just parted, forever. All she is left with now is a photograph:

[...] zostanie tylko fotografia,  
to – to jest bardzo mało...

(...) a photograph is what you're left with,  
that's – that's all too little...<sup>33</sup>

The photographic medium made part of the movie highlights the process of glancing/gazing/looking to an even greater extent, since the photograph – tacit as it is, entirely immobile and stationary, phenomenologically reduced in the area of motion and confined to the black-and-white range of colours gets constituted as a sense of lack or shortage. Jean Baudrillard situates at the centre of a photographic image the figures of absence and unreality, which prejudice the so-called impossibility to capture an image. The French philosopher argues that image is powerful because of its inner emptiness that can be approached as a challenge that 'defies all resemblance'.<sup>34</sup> As a figure or character, Władysław Niwiński is uncaptur-

32 C. Cotton, *The Photography as Contemporary Art* (London: 2020), p. 49.

33 M. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, "Fotografia" [The Photograph], in: idem, *Poezje zebrane* [Collected poems], vol. 1 (Torun: 1993), p. 157.

34 J. Baudrillard, *Le paroxyste indifférent. Entretiens avec Philippe Petit* [1997], quoted after the English

able, whether in a 'real life' or in a portrait. Only a photograph remains – as a trace which fades away, grows obliterated and eventually disappears. The photographic portrait is all that remains of the loss of the loved one, and it activates in Basia the awareness of his absence. The final scene of *Polskie drogi* shows a struggle at the Warsaw cemetery of Powązki, in which Władek and Johann both get killed. Their bodies become motionless and freeze like in a photograph – for the latter is, after all, 'the dead theater of Death'.<sup>35</sup>

### PHOTOGRAPH-PROMPT

Personal photography emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, gradually becoming part of social practice of the families that strove to preserve community experiences within diverse portraits. This was obviously accompanied with the conviction of necessity to preserve and convey the family histories, perpetuated in images, to the generations to come. Ever since its emergence did photography fulfil other functions too, serving as an act of communication and a way of exchanging experiences. Family photos is one of the motifs featured in the television series *Dom*.<sup>36</sup> Photography is ascribed in this work a traditional function of a medium of memory, whilst it is also a prop which, depending on the surroundings and placement in time, exerts an impact on the events and on the characters' decisions. The film is a complex story of the postwar fates of the families residing in the tenement house at 25 Złota Street, Warsaw.

W powojennej, zrujnowanej Warszawie – która jest figurą całego kraju – rodzi się nowe życie (dosłownie i w przenośni). Serial *Dom* należy zaliczyć do kina społecznego, obyczajowego, ponieważ przedstawione zostały tam losy kilku rodzin, reprezentujących najczęstsze postawy życiowe Polaków. Każdy z bohaterów ma swoje oczekiwania, plany i nadzieje i każdy z bohaterów zderza się – mniej lub bardziej boleśnie – z wielką historią oraz – co oczywiste – z polityką. Są tu przedstawiciele inteligencji, burżuazji, chłopów i robotników, wojska i aparatu władzy oraz represji. Wielką zaletą serialu jest to, że nastrój epoki bardzo się udziela. Dzieje się tak, dlatego że realia czasów zostały wiernie oddane, ale nade wszystko charaktery

In the postwar Warsaw, a city all in ruins – a figure of the entire country – a new life emerges, both literally and figuratively. The serial *Dom* has to be named a piece of social or slice-of-life cinema as it shows the histories of several families, representing the most common outlooks on life among Poles. Each of the characters has his or her expectations, plans and hopes and each of them comes across the great history, in a more or less painful way, and – quite obviously – with politics. Among them are members of intelligentsia, bourgeoisie, peasantry, the working class, the military, the machinery of power and repression. A great advantage of the film is that the mood of the era is hitting. This is because the realities

version: *Paroxysm. Interviews with Philippe Petit*, transl. by C. Turner (London and New York: 1998), p. 94.

35 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida...*, p. 90.

36 *Dom* [The House]: Polish television series, premiered 16<sup>th</sup> January 1980; directed by Jan Łomnicki, written by Jerzy Janicki and Andrzej Mularczyk, music by Waldemar Kazanecki and Piotr Hertel, director of photography Bogusław Lambach.

i rozterki postaci pokazane w bardzo przejmujący sposób sprawiają, że widz się z nimi utożsamia.

of the time are faithfully captured whereas the protagonists' characters and inner turmoil, shown in a poignant manner, make the viewer identify themselves with them.<sup>37</sup>

Along with the various political, social and historical threads, the initial episodes highlight the motif of photography, which influences the psychical and physical condition of the three central characters: Barbara (Basia) Lawinówna, Łukasz Zbożny and Andrzej Talar. In a debris-covered cellar, the caretaker, Ryszard Popiołek, finds the Lawinas' family album which contains familial pictures of Basia's parents, photos of the girl and her fiancé Łukasz from their school years. Such photos are an important carrier to solidify the family's memory. The protagonists' contact with them encourages a contemplative and inquisitive attitude, and is significant to the extent that it initiates an attempt to read the meaning of the past. Susan Sontag argues and photographs serves as a means of recording family life: 'Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness'.<sup>38</sup> Taking photos and creating their collections expresses the will to establish a dialogue between generations, across age categories. Communication of this kind begins in the movie under discussion: the photograph becomes a pretext for the talks between the dwellers and their visitors. Mr. Popiołek recollects the history of a prewar family and asks the young Talar to hand over the album to its owners. His micro-narratives on the people portrayed in these photographs function as external memory and are a clear sign testifying to a timeless construction of the bonds between the entire community inhabiting the house. The past is important not only in the context of meaningful historic events but also from the standpoint of a familial micro-history. André Bazin, the French film critic, observes that, as regards family albums,

» Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration (...) for photography does not create eternity, as art does; it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption.<sup>39</sup>

37 See: <https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/156/artykul/2616754,serial-dom-portret-35-lat-warszawy> [accessed 31 August 2023].

38 S. Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 5.

39 A. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, essays selected and transl. by H. Gray (Berkeley: 1967), p. 14.

The twine of memory and history is the basic aspect of the family-related and social application and significance of photography. Photography's (inter)relation with death or any other loss has different shades and impacts, depending on the epoch. Especially in the former half of the nineteenth century, photography tended to be discursively connected to death; however, in the context of diverse historical events, it gained in significance as a priceless keepsake, a proof of identity, or a prop that enables to recognise a person. The photographic album is like a reflection of the fates of the Lawina family: it has survived, in spite of the Warsaw Uprising, with minor damage and fractures on the cover, resembling the survival of the whole family despite material losses and some personal injuries. Having lost an arm, Doctor Lawina is not capable of pursuing his practice as a dentist, but he does work at the university's faculty of medicine. His wife has sold their wedding ring and now bakes doughnuts to provide for her loved ones for the household; their daughter is undergoing a long-lasting recuperation in the aftermath of typhus. Accompanied by Andrzej, Basia is incessantly searching her lost fiancé Łukasz, amidst the ruins, dug-up graves and advertisements. The prewar world of families dwelling in Poland's capital city formed a collection of images worth collecting indeed; yet, the roles ascribed to the persons featured in family pictures became played in a different manner in the postwar period – in the space of the destroyed city.

The Lawina family's life unexpectedly changes the moment Andrzej, infatuated with Basia, steals her photograph, one of a girl with braids, from the album. The fate of the family's youngest member would not immediately unfold according to the pattern that had been planned before the war: she was expected to obtain her physician's certificate and get married to the poet Łukasz Zbożny. The gesture of taking her photograph out of the album symbolically stands for redirecting her destiny to Andrzej's hands. This young student has pocketed her portrait for two reasons: first, he wants an effigy of his loved one to always be with him like a love talisman; second, it is through this object that he wants to deliver Basia from her illusory hope that she might eventually find Łukasz. Having questioned several witnesses, Andrzej is confirmed in the conviction that the young poet, together with the entire 'Miotła' battalion, perished in the Uprising; therefore, in one of the exhumation places and disposal-sites of mementoes of the deceased, he underlays a photograph of the album girl – identical with the one Łukasz had once received from Basia. This photo becomes one of the props – along with prayer-books, holy medals, straps, belts, combs, mirrors, buttons, which in many cases have enabled to confirm the identities of those executed by firing squads. Some of the props, however – like in the theatre – give a start to a complex scheme. These two photographs cause that the girl's fate gets split, in terms of her involvement with two men.

From a psychological perspective, the photograph as a prop in *Dom* allows to depict two states in human life: reaction to the death of a loved person and attempt at working through the mourning.<sup>40</sup> Basia's recognition of the photograph as a proof confirming that Łukasz is no more alive triggers in her an unforeseen reaction: she gets angry and helpless at the same time, screaming and crying alternately. The black-and-white photo brought about an illusion of death – so strong that even when Andrzej owns up that he had stolen it from the family album and underlay it among the keepsakes of the exhumated persons, the bereaved Basia appears unready to accept the news. 'The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on time'.<sup>41</sup> The sense of an irreversible loss and the longing for the lost one have stuck in her like a thorn. Her mourning never expires, and would not be left among the graves with candles lit on them. Mourning turns out to be a complicated process, not yet fully explored by psychology. As Sigmund Freud pointed out in his 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholy*,

» Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person (...). (...) The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings (...).<sup>42</sup>

As a process, mourning can be divided into two stages, of which the first consists in a gradual detachment and effacement of the bonds between the bewailer and the deceased person, whereas the second aims at adapting to the conditions of a life in

40 The modern research into reactions/responses to the death of a loved person and the related mourning points to three discernible stages: first comes the moment of shock combined with 'torpor' and a sense of disbelief in the incurred loss; second, 'shrinking into oneself' with a growing painful sense of deprivation and the accompanying feeling of injustice, anger and remorse; and, third, the phase of adaptation: the person in mourning adapts to the new situation by accepting the feelings related to the loss and deprivation, which tend to fade with time; see <https://www.mp.pl/pacjent/psychiatria/choroby/91656,zaloba-i-depresja-w-przebiegu-zaloby> [accessed 10 September 2023]. However, responses can vary, depending on a number of factors such as age, attachment to the deceased person, one's system of religious beliefs and cultural traditions. The individual immersed in mourning may exhibit behaviours that appear contrary or dissimilar to his/her earlier reactions and behavioural patterns familiar to those around him/her.

41 R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida...*, pp. 88–89.

42 S. Freud, *Trauer und Melancholie* [1917]; quoted after the English version: *Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the complete works of Sigmund Freud*, transl. by J. Strachy (London: 1953–1974, vol. 14, pp. 243–244).

which the loved one can no more participate. At the final stage of 'working through the loss', the individual establishes new relationships – with other people – and alters his/her previous attitude toward the one that is gone. The observations of the Viennese psychologist can be referred to the behaviours of Basia Lawinówna, who, after the phase of mourning her beloved one does her best to forget about what has happened and therefore starts flirting with other men, dancing in nightclubs, drinks herself silly and even attempts suicide. Step by step, however, the support, patience and consideration of Talar, a student who is in love with her, Basia regains a mental balance: she overcomes the illness, completes her examinations, gets married and enjoys the progressing reconstruction of Warsaw. The photograph spotted by her amidst the mementos of those killed is, one can say, of the sort of a Platonian *pharmakon*. On the one hand, it is a poison, as it arouses in Basia a sense of irreversible loss and causes her depression; on the other, it is a remedy that relieves her from the obsessive memories and the torments of searching for her fiancé. Finally, to close this painful stage of her life, Lawinówna views the family album and removes from it the photo of her fiancé. As she believes, 'the dead should not be there among the living'; she thus endeavours to 'erase' Łukasz also from her memory. This scene can be related to the reflection proposed by the writer Thomas Bernhard. In his novel *Extinction*, photography is described as an efficient method of erasing the reality, one that attempts to replace the latter with images.<sup>43</sup> In the movie's scene, the photograph's *extinction* has a therapeutic function as it removes memories – and, together with them, tough and painful experiences – from the protagonist's consciousness.

The photograph as a prop placed by Talar amidst the other keepsakes favours the building of dramatic narrative in line with a retardation technique. Introduced in the plot, the motif of this photograph implies that Basia's postwar encounter with Łukasz is delayed, while a tension of waiting is triggered in the viewer. In her essay *Delaying Cinema*, Laura Mulvey writes:

» There is narrative cinema in which delay is essential to the desire for the end, elongating the road down which the story travels, postponing the structurally inevitable conclusion. There is narrative cinema in which delay opens up alternative narrative opportunities, displacing the desire for the end.<sup>44</sup>

43 For this, and more, remarks on photography, see: T. Bernhard, *Auslöschung. Ein Zerfall* [1986]; English version: *Extinction*, transl. by D. McLintock (London: 1996), passim.

44 L. Mulvey, *Delaying Cinema*, chap. 8 in: eadem, *Death 24x a Second. Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: 2006), p. 144.



Fig. 1. *Dom* [The House]. L to R: Tomasz Borkowy (actor) as Andrzej Talar, unidentified actor, Wojciech Turowski (actor), Krystyna Ciechomska (actress), Jolanta Żółkowska (actress) as Basia Lawinówna, Krzysztof Machowski (seated; actor). National Film Archive, ref. no. 1-F-1620-7.

For the viewer, of importance becomes the narrative context of the photography, which is a challenge or an expectation that the mystery will be explained. Many years afterwards, Łukasz finds Basia in Warsaw and makes her aware that he has never lost the hope – and never lost the photograph of a girl with braids. The prewar Lawina family album with the empty spots left by the removed photos of Basia and Łukasz are filled again; thus, the war over, yet another story of the clan's youngest couple is marked. Perhaps, the producers of *Dom* sought a purpose similar to that once expressed by the poet Tomasz Jastrun in an introduction to the collection of poems entitled *Album rodzinny* [A family album]: 'I wanted these poems and photographs to witness the history – the big and the small, family one. I wanted them to talk not only to one another but also with the reader'.<sup>45</sup>

The photography-prop featured in the *Dom* series evokes diverse potential wartime and postwar scenarios for families expecting their loved ones to return or searching for them. It is hard to decide whether acquiring the knowledge (supposed

45 T. Jastrun, *Album rodzinny. Wiersze i fotografie* [The family album. Poems and photographs] (Warsaw: 2022), p. 9.

facts) on their dead has released a number of people from their traumatic memories, or perhaps, waiting for the lost ones to return would have been a better solution: even if futile, it would have been filled with hope and thus helpful in their daily living. Regardless of these options, the film producers have taken into account the therapeutic dimension of the photography which has enabled the characters to work through the painful states of human psyche.

\*

The selected photographic portraits in the films *Noce i dnie* (those of Teresa Kocięłło and Bogumił Niechcic), *Polskie drogi* (Władysław Niwiński) and *Dom* (Barbara Lawinówna and Łukasz Zbożny) show diverse ways of (re)presenting the motif of photograph(y) in Polish cinema. The 'photography-in-film' effect enables to highlight the profound meanings of the photos in question. Activating the operation of the human mind, photographic portraits enable one to invoke memories, allowing to solidify or extinguish images in the memory; at times, they may essentially affect the individual's emotional development. As a means of artistic expression, photography is related to a whole array of human behaviours and their accompanying emotions. Artists, writers, film directors 'know how to talk with photos. They know how to express the feelings that incite in us records of the past captured by the camera, ones that testify to the time of a never-cooled-down memory one has been through'.<sup>46</sup>

*Translated by Tristan Korecki*

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## ABSTRACT

One of the more interesting phenomena in Polish cinematography is the use of the ‘photograph in film’ effect. Such a device enables the doubling of scenes and exhibiting of various photographic themes. A picture within a picture is an inter-

mingling of moving and static image. Such constructions have an influence on various ways of storytelling, changes of timelines and spaces, as well as unexpected twists in a work of film. The selected photographic portraits in film, of Teresa Kocięłło and Bogumił Niechcic (*Noce i dnie* [*Nights and Days*]), Władysław Niwiński (*Polskie drogi* [*The Passions of Poland*]), Barbara Lawinówna and Łukasz Zbożny (*Dom* [*The House*]), are connected by the tradition of family photography, black and white aesthetic, as well as by their links to socio-historical events (the outbreak of World War I, World War II, post-war effects of the Warsaw Uprising). The diverse interpretations of the theme of photography, however, set various perspectives in motion: a psychological one (Sigmund Freud), anthropological one (Hans Belting), and, most importantly, those relating to the theory and aesthetics of photography (Roland Barthes, François Soulages, Marianna Michałowska). Photographic portraits in film also refer to different cultural, historical and social contexts (photography as memento, photography as trace, photography as prop), as well as presenting a complex mechanism of how the images of human memory function (remembering – reconstructing, fading – erasing).

**KEYWORDS:** photographic portrait, photography in film, photography aesthetics, mourning, aesthetics of memories