EPSTEIN'S AND GODARD'S REFLECTIONS ON THE FILM LANDSCAPE

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> Epstein could not separate different forces of cinema, which for him seemed to be simultaneously heading in the same cinegenic direction. [...] The reason Godard called himself a cinema historian rather than a philosopher was because he had to make that separation. On the one hand, the force of revelation, the force of pure thought, pure conceptualization cinema, on the other hand, the force of narrative, explanation and analysis of what is left of the history of cinema.[1]
>
> Jacques Aumont

It is interesting how the theorizing artists' thoughts and postulates regarding cinema and film are manifested in their films. This coupling is extremely noticeable in the authors of works which can be perceived as theoretical statements. They include special films with an undetermined and ambiguous genre status, which are now often referred to as essay films or video essays. Considerations devoted to landscape constitute a special subject of interest for artists who are interested in aesthetic reflection on the nature of image in culture and on the status of film.

A function and meaning of landscape as an independent aesthetic or sensory unit becomes an important area of reflection for Jean Epstein and Jean-Luc Godard, among others.[2] My intention is to look at the ways in which

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[1] J. Aumont, *L'œil interminable*, Ed. de la Differance, Paris 2007, p. 167.

[2] A lot of other filmmakers write down their own thoughts concerning the essence of film art, and sometimes they include elements of reflection upon landscape there, e.g. Robert Bresson, Eric Rohmer, Sergei Eisenstein and others). Cf.: Jacques Aumont, *Les théories des cinéastes*, ed. Nathan, Paris 2002.

their theoretical insights are employed in their works being theoretical essay films treated on an equal footing with texts. The correspondence between the theoretical assumptions and the visual practices of the directors is a convincing example of the presence of reflection on landscape in cinema, probably different from standard approaches to this subject.

The topic is very complex and although it has already been addressed, juxtaposing the proposals of the two filmmakers having rich cinematic and theoretical achievements – important for shaping directorial reflection – seems cognitively promising.

Both Jean Epstein and Jean-Luc Godard are artists sensitive to the image, its formal aspect and aesthetic value. However, it would be a mistake to think that both artists focus solely on the aesthetics of their works; quite on the contrary, to paraphrase Godard: "aesthetics is a question of morality." Their often very sophisticated manners of presenting reality conceal motifs completely different from aesthetic ones. Namely, they are interested in more than a superficial overview or appearance, especially in the context of landscape representations.

My goal is to highlight Epstein's and Godard's concepts which are both original and somehow similar in terms of understanding the essence of film landscape. It is worth noting that the artists' avant-garde achievements cover a total period of over 100 years. Epstein finished his artistic activity in 1948, just a few years before Godard made his debut short film in 1955. Although they did not have the opportunity to meet in person (neither cinema historians nor Godard himself mention it), they share an avant-garde tradition, a desire to experiment with the matter of cinema, extensive film and theoretical achievements, and a particular preference for presenting landscapes that function as a kind of synecdoche, fulfilling more important than only aesthetic, descriptive or sensory functions.

Having interpreted their attitude to landscape issues expressed both in their writings and films, I concluded that the author of *Passion* falls into the category of thinking through image-landscape, whereas the director of *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) tends to explore reality by means of film landscape. This difference is justified in their distinct ideas concerning the mission to be fulfilled by cinema. And although both artists achieve similar aesthetic effects of representing landscape on the screen, the effects derive from different premises. Indicating these differences will become the subject of my reflection in this article. I would like to emphasize the similarities and analogies between

the achievements of Godard and Epstein as directors-philosophers, but also to show the different goals that guide each of them and result from their interest in landscapes of nature (above all). Due to the extensiveness of this topic, I focus on these threads in their written and visual reflection which testify to the lively interest in the film landscape, showing their thoughts in the light of selected comments by contemporary researchers of their work. It should be noted that despite the extensive literature on the achievements of both directors[3] and slightly fewer publications on film landscape, the comparative approach I propose has not yet been properly addressed. My approach accentuates, most of all, the role of landscape in shaping a complex and rich reflection on cinema, but also the potential of exploring reality by the film medium where the representation of landscape plays a significant role. The existing reflexion on this topic has referred to individual film measures or specific practices, such as the use of movement aberration in films, or philosophical reflection characterizing the work of both directors.

I begin this article by presenting Godard's approach to landscape issues being clearly inspired by Epstein's experiences and discoveries, for example in the field of experimentation with motion in film. It directly translates into Godard's approach to representing natural landscapes, which makes him Epstein's successor.[4] It is about understanding and applying one characteristic of the film camera, namely photogenia. It was noticed by the author of *The Fires of the Sea* (*Les Feux de la mer* 1948), who then devoted a lot of attention to this property in his writings and applied it to his films from the very beginning, finally bringing it to perfection in his works from the 1940s.

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[3] It is impossible to recall the complete literature on the work of Epstein and Godard, as it is too extensive. However, in the Polish context it is worth noting the following monographs: *Godard. Pasaże* P. Mościckiego, Kraków-Warszawa 2010, *Pasja. Filmy Jeana-Luca Godarda* E. Mazierskiej, Kraków-Warszawa 2010, *Obraz zatrzymany. Praktyka i teoria późnego Godarda,* B. Kita, Katowice 2013, *Studium natury w sztuce filmowej* Z. Czeczota-Gawraka. In the area of French-language literature, I would like to point to more recent volumes: *Jean Esptein. Actualité et posterités*, eds. R. Hamery and E. Thouvenel, Rennes 2016, *Nul mieux que Godard*, Paris 1999, *Histoire(s) du cinema de Jean-Luc Godard. La force faible d'un* art, Paris 2006, Jean-Luc Godard. Documents, eds. N. Brenez, D. Faroult et al., Paris 2001.

[4] Cf. Barbara Kita, *Obraz zatrzymany. Praktyka i teoria późnego Godarda*, Katowice 2013, pp. 146-147.

The aim of my reflection is to indicate the analogy between Epstein's and Godard's approaches to the significant landscapes present in their works, and thus to determine the role the landscape plays in their audiovisual texts and writings.

Thinking through image-landscape

Godard turns to Epstein's photogenia or overimpression as a means of expressing his need to retain the viewer's attention, as a kind of "prosthesis of vision,"[5] as Jacques Aumont describes it. Moreover, from the moment he moved to Switzerland, specific landscapes become close to him and visible in his films, namely places of his daily walks. These landscapes are often (quite unexpectedly) almost identical or at least similar to the Breton landscapes known from Epstein's last films. In his writings, Godard pays little direct attention to the issue of landscape itself (that is, the term itself does not appear too often). The artist focuses on the issue of the cinematic image as such, its meaning-generative potential, which, combined with the painterly roots of his thoughts on the film image, actually gives a broader landscape perspective. Thus, film landscape is understood by him as a special type of image that has an additional, specific feature, even more accurately characterizing the potential of the thinking image (see Jacques Rancière's concept of a "pensive image),[6] enabling at the same time contemplation and a kind of entry into landscape through reflection devoted to it. Difficulties in the reconstruction of reflections on landscape in Godard's work are compounded by the fact that his visual and written considerations are not well-ordered.

The dual status of the creator-theorist, applicable to both directors, is not a novel invention as it has been known at least since the Renaissance. Besides, Godard was simultaneously writing and filming since the beginning of his career. In recent decades, the boundaries between these practices were almost completely blurred: "I think of myself as an essayist, producing essays in novel form, or novels in an essay form: only instead of writing, I film them" – he defined his status already in the 1960s.[7] Off-screen commentaries from many

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[5] J. Aumont, *Les théories des cinéastes*, ed. Nathan, Paris 2002, p. 45.

[6] Cf. J. Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé*, La Fabrique éditions, Paris 2008 (dir.: *L'image pensive*).

[7] Godard on Godard. Transl. and ed. Tom Milne. Da Capo Press, New York 1986, p.9.

of his films have their printed equivalents, which all the more strengthens the sense of complementarity of his visual and written reflection. It is worth emphasizing that reflection on landscape and the presence of landscape matter in films always played an important role for this director, but until the 1980s it was related rather to urban areas and was firmly anchored in painting contexts, which in Godard's case was more complicated than one might think.[8] It is true that at different periods of his work, the artist referred to painting, but each time differently: using the strategy of cinematization (actuating a painting), adapting painting to cinema, focusing on color composition, or – what is most noteworthy – studying light or intensity of colors or even trying to extract a thought contained in the painting.

According to Rancière, the thinking (pensive) image draws the line between the thinking and the non-thinking, the active and the passive, between art and non-art.[9] From the time of working on *Every Man for Himself* (1980), Godard's films – probably due to the surroundings of the Helvetian village – become increasingly penetrated by the landscapes of mountains, water (rivers and lakes), huge boulders that seem to mitigate the severity of the subject: sexuality, factory work, death, war or faith. The range of moods evoked by landscapes is quite wide: from eye-pleasing colorful garden compositions (he used to say: I am a gardener who plants paintings in films like flowers on flower beds), through extensive spots of water and mountain colors, as in A *Letter to Freddy Buache*, to *JLG/JLG. Self-Portrait in December* in which the author immerses himself in his familiar nocturnal, winter, dark-grey landscape. Because it is not about beauty or seducing the audience with a postcard view. Although the landscape is not beautiful, it is still attractive and attention-grabbing be-cause it is often slowed down or completely still, and thus cannot be missed by the viewer: "The role of landscape seems to be increasing in significance beginning with *Every Man for Himself (*1980), and the views of vast water and a huge moon or sun between the clouds are 'intertwined,' interwoven as in a fabric with images of Mary standing alone in the window, not understanding her vocation in the film *Hail Mary* (…) Thus, landscape never plays the role

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[8] See: B. Kita, *Obraz zatrzymany. Praktyka i teoria późnego Godarda*, WUŚ and WW.Oficyna Wydawnicza, Katowice, 2013 (especially a chapter: *Zatrzymane kadry/obraz malarski*, pp. 111-179).

[9] J. Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé*, pp. 115-116.

of a background for something, it is always manifested as such, generating meanings for itself."[10]

Godard was obsessed to show the landscape "from behind," from the other side: "to show what is behind the landscape?"[11] to film the landscape which is behind a human character. When posing questions about the relationship between the landscape and the characters, Godard states: "Getting to know landscape takes time. We film roughly (…). There are moments when landscape allows you to think differently, because when filming a tree, the face-to-face relationship is not the same (…) Landscape is a companion, it is a philosopher,"[12] because it has always existed, "landscape is older than human beings."[13] Such thoughts justify the significant presence of landscapes in the films of this artist. At the same time, the combination of this reflection with very consistent observations on the role of images in culture results in the artist's attachment to landscape as a form of image representation. While working on the painting trilogy (*Passion, 1981, First Name*: *Carmen*, 1983 *and Hail Mary*, 1984) and the Helvetic trilogy (*Oh Woe Is Me*, 1993, *Nouvelle Vague,* 1990 *and JLG/JLG: Self-Portrait in December,* 1995), the artist gradually brings his landscape research to certain solutions. A very important introduction to the reflection on the role of landscape is, in my opinion, *A Letter to Freddy Buache* (1981) – although it is one of his earlier films, it constitutes a kind of important introduction to the reflection on the role of landscape, it is a portrait of a city, whereas the second film, *Self-Portrait in December* is a kind of image of the artist himself (which is a direct reference to the tradition of painter's self-portrait). The first is a kind of exercise in landscape, whereas the second finally brings an answer to the question about the nature of landscape and the ability to show it. Godard had a special attachment to Ernst Lubitsch, to whom he dedicated the portrait of Lausanne, and whose words he repeated many times (*History*(s) of the *Cinema*…) in various films: "If you know how to film mountains, water and greenery, you'll know how to film people." Therefore, he consistently shifts the camera's attention from the city

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[10] Kita, *Obraz zatrzymany*, p. 159

[11] *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard 1984-1998*, ed. Etablis Alain Bergala, Seuil, Paris 1998, p. 379

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

to its surroundings: "The city is fiction, greenery, forest, water is a novel" – in *A Letter to Freddy…* he explains his strategy of shifting attention from the grayness of the city to water and mountains, blues and greens, whose vague color spots bring his works again closer to painting.

Landscape in Godard's films is independent. Even when the characters are in the foreground, they are clearly attracted and determined by the environment which is not indifferent to the composition of the whole. The landscape-refrain is followed by anamnesis, memory, childhood memories, because it is for this reason that Godard again invokes landscape on the screen – to recall the memory of earlier landscapes, already inscribed in the memory of images. The water that flows is significantly marked by the author: it evokes the landscapes of his childhood spent in Switzerland, it is reminiscent of his boyish moments. Individual and collective memory, History (big and small), as well as memories of the past – all stand behind the landscape; the winter, sea, mountain and river landscape opens a character to itself, and this character is always present there thanks to appropriate film measures.

"Landscape is wise as a painting" claims Godard in the film *Script of Every Man for Himself* (1979). This statement clearly locates landscape on the side of painting, however, not only in its aesthetic field, but also in Godard's commitment to the thinking image. It legitimizes its importance, value and, finally, the presence sanctioned by film measures: slow travelling, long takes or resemblance to a painting. The persistent desire to find out what is behind film landscape reveals the need to discover what an image is hiding, what its meaning is. Image is a thought, an idea, a mystery that the artist strives to reveal through a female body, painting impressions or religious connotations: "I would like to see the interior of image" – he declares, and the exploration of landscapes is to help him achieve this goal. The desired complexity of image is achieved by overexposure, which is very often used by this director, especially in *History(s) of the Cinema* (1988-1998). Behind landscape there will always be a thought, just like behind a face there is always an interior – a soul. In *JLG/JLG* we can observe the clash of the interior and the exterior; a room and a lake, fields, forests. Godard can be seen and heard in them as he is wandering, appearing within a frame and commenting on his surroundings and his presence. His comments and quotes are numerous. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish a quote from the author's comment. "Coldness, loneliness, emerging mental landscapes are not those seen outside, but may

suit them, in a fluid and cold space,"[14] writes Didier Coureau and emphasizes the appropriateness between the mental landscape and the landscape outside the window. The end of Godard's text/comment opens up to new shots: through the window the camera is immersing in a snowy, frozen, crystalline world that emphasizes the thoughts of the director coming out of his library. What happened was "the crystallization of landscape in the folds of the text,"[15] which – just like an image – constitutes a crucial element of forming Godard's statements.

When quoting Bernanos or Pessoa, Godard almost directly indicates his own understanding of film landscape which found its localization in a geographical area between France and Switzerland, between the Jura and the Alps, at Lake Geneva. This area simultaneously corresponds with the internal landscape of the director himself. The same was true of the quoted poet who associated Portuguese landscapes with his own universe.[16] Landscapes that at first seem neutral and non-functional in relation to precise geography allow us to organize mental landscapes.

Summing up this thread, it is worth recalling the words of Alain Bergala: "Every picture by Godard tends to be a piece of the world and its metaphor. To show us things in themselves (…) Each frame is at the same time a window open to a fragment of the landscape and a painting."[17] Godard's landscapes force the viewer to stop, to reflect, and the protagonist to start the mechanism of anamnesis. Being the equivalent of what is inside the character, landscapes become a representation of the mechanism of memory, recalling, for example, the childhood years (as in the case of the director himself in *Self-Portrait in December*), they make us think. At the same time, landscapes are part of a series of theoretical and visual, essayistic reflections on painting, being a special variation of it – a case corresponding simultaneously with the effect of painting. We are dealing here with geophilosophy (Gilles Deleuze), consisting

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[14] D. Coureau, *Jean-Luc Godard 1990-1995. Nouvelle Vaque, Hélas pour moi, JLG/JLG. Complexité esthétique. Esthétique de la complexité*, Cedex Lille 2010, p. 89

[15] Ibid.

[16] Cf. ibid., p. 205.

[17] A. Bergala, *Nul mieux que Godard*, Paris 1999, p. 85.

in mapping mental landscapes that result from combining thoughts with a geo-filmic map.[18] In this way, landscapes trigger both memory and reflection.

Landscape: eye of the camera

Celine Scemama's book devoted to Godard's *History(s) of the Cinema* contains a chapter with a significant title: *The intelligence of a machine*, directly referring to the title of one of Jean Epstein's books. The chapter includes the following excerpt: "For Epstein, cinema has its own phenomenon, he discovers that everything can become unrecognizable when captured with the camera eye. Godard adopts this way of thinking about cinema from Epstein, for whom Cinema is not only a tool of art, but also of philosophy." The machine Epstein refers to is far from being reduced to a reproduction machine. For Godard too, it becomes a machine used for 'confession of the soul,' 'a machine of the imagination,' or finally 'a machine for practicing philosophy.'[19] Thus, another aspect shared by these authors consists in perceiving a special role of the cinema, not so much in the field of storytelling, but rather discovering the reality. While Godard discovers it through the impact which landscape has on the protagonists of his films, Epstein treats landscape as one of the ways of representing nature/realness.

The directors also share (which is quite interesting) a sense of attachment to Brittany, however it is less visible in Godard's works (due to his place of residence and focus on Swiss landscapes), yet already in *Le Petit Soldat* (1963) the protagonist claims that his favorite place is Brittany, probably because of its light that the director likes: gentle and dim, non-aggressive. The landscape of Brittany is revealed in its intense, unexpected beauty in the film *In Praise of Love* (2001) employing Fauvist colors, breaking the landscape stereotype known from other films or paintings presenting dark views of the stormy sea. *In Praise of Love* is very close to the landscape imagination initiated by Epstein in his Brittany films.[20]

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[18] Cf. D. Coureau…, p. 204.

[19] C. Scemama, *Histoire(s) du cinéma de Jean-Luc Godard. La force faible d'un art.* Paris 2006, p. 83.

[20] Cf. Kita, *Obraz zatrzymany,* p. 137: ("Godard reconciled visions-views popular among the impressionists: clouds, sky and water, with the concept of rocks, solids and strong forms of Cézanne").

Epstein was undoubtedly the first philosopher of cinema and the first figure whose theoretical program initiated aesthetic reflection on film. Like Godard, he preferred to address cinema or even cinematograph rather than film, which is both significant and obvious, because initially he was focusing on the technical capabilities of cinema and its apparatus, believing that until then no other technique had made it possible to study reality as thoroughly as cinema (owing to its unique tool).

In Brittany, Epstein found his destiny in both life and film; the land of the dark sea, rocky high cliffs and scattered islets absorbed him after his impressionistic avant-garde phase in Paris. His attachment to marine landscapes should be explained by the need to both expose and explore a new medium with its implicit potential to activate even immovable objects. Water in its continuous, eternal movement is a very grateful object to demonstrate capabilities of the cinematograph, and registering movement was always the most fascinating of its features. Hence, sea and water landscapes and their surroundings were often depicted in early (avant-garde) cinema. The author of *The Storm Tamer* (1947) combined the reflections expressed in his writings on the role of the camera in the study of realness (with the important role of landscapes) with a simultaneous demonstration of his beliefs in films-essays of a somewhat ethnological nature, prompted by his interest in life in the nature of the inhabitants of extreme environments of Brittany. Pierre Leprohon, already in 1933, after the premiere of *Finis Terrae* (1928), noticed a significant change in Epstein's representation of Breton landscapes, namely the economy of themes and forms: "Before him raw matter, from which it is necessary to create a synthesis, to extort a secret."[21] This observation says a lot about the approach to the place itself and the way it is represented, based on noticing of what usually escapes perception (as being too obvious, for example) thanks to the film camera.

Eric Thouvenel noted that Epstein in his films as well as in his texts used water not only as a metaphor, but also as a formal, theoretical and linguistic matrix.[22] Referring to my proposal to define a function that landscapes play in

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[21] P. Leprohon quoted from: Z. Gawrak, *Jean Epstein. Studium natury w sztuce filmowej,* WAiF, Warszawa 1962, p. 127.

[22] E. Thouvenel, *Les images de l'eau dans le cinema français des annnes 20,* Rennes 2010, p. 200.

his films, particularly in Breton poems, it can be stated that they are actually a tool of cognition owing to the camera. There is a kind of appropriateness and reciprocity here: cinema is created to emphasize movement, e.g. of the sea, waves, clouds, whereas water is the perfect embodiment of the idea of movement, so it constitutes a perfect object to be filmed. On the one hand, water reveals the nature of cinema, on the other hand, it reveals nature as such and even its soul, which the artist accentuated since *Mor Vran* (1930). He was particularly interested in the potential of the film camera in exploring the soul, the magic of nature and the legends created by people. "Both documentary and feature films became a real place of theoretical development for Epstein,"[23] notes Laura Vichi. His education in science and medicine often led him, especially in documentaries, to discover other worlds. "Other" meaning invisible to the naked eye, but very visible when looking through the film camera, the cinematograph. Since cinema – as Jacques Aumont notes after studying Epstein's texts and films – "reveals something from the inside of the themes being filmed: it is part of a photogenic revelation (…) Cinema shows us a truer picture of the represented being (…) because it is objectively equipped with the ability of psychological penetration."[24] However, in the context of landscape, it is important to notice the gesture of integrating a human being with the environment, with the place and landscape in both the director's writings and films. While in Godard's case landscape can be read as a painting, and the author, when writing about painting, often means landscape, in Epstein's case landscape is essentially equal to nature. When he refers to nature, it can be concluded that the director's reflection refers precisely to landscape – which, by the way, cannot be treated as unimportant. Zbigniew Czeczot-Gawrak believed that there is a framework that combines numerous aesthetic, philosophical and technical reflections present in Epstein's texts and films, and this framework is nature, in which the artist seems to express unflagging interest in his Breton period. However, the study of nature is also the study of human who is part of it, just like the sea, mountains and fields.[25]

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[23] L. Vichi, *Filmer le reél, élaborer une théorie*, in: (eds.) R. Hamery, E. Thouvenel, *Jean Epstein. Actualité et postérités,* Rennes 2016, p. 90.

[24] J. Aumont, *Les théories des cinéastes*, ed. Nathan, Paris 2002, p. 59.

[25] Z. Czeczot-Gawrak, *Jean Epstein. Studium natury w sztuce filmowej*, WAiF, Warszawa 1962, p. 196.

In this way, a kind of "realistic ballad about reality" is created.[26] Epstein performs quite restrictive actions leading to the final film effect: firstly, everything which does not have a symbolic and emotional value is eliminated; then formal issues come to the fore: only elements which have a rhythmic and artistic value remain, which in turn makes reality memorable. Breton poems are theoretical manifestos to a greater extent than other works, especially in the landscape context. Known as nature films, these avant-garde documentaries – owing to the threatening landscapes contained in them – demonstrate a symbiosis of nature and human. Epstein wanted to discover the identity of these wild, virgin places, captured in "a cinematographic landscape situated between legend and reality."[27] The assumption expressed in *Bonjour Cinéma* was to create a film in which nothing or little happens, "the anecdote is invisible, expressed neither by text nor by image, but 'in between,'"[28] in a relation. This idea found its outlet and representation in landscape films where the waves of the sea, the violence of a storm over the ocean, the sound of waves or swirling dark clouds become main actors, located next to unprofessional human ones.

"Landscape can be a state of the soul. It is definitely a state. A rest. Also the one that is given to us in documentaries from beautiful Brittany or from a trip to Japan, they should not be treated as picturesque. But the 'dance of the landscape' is photogenic. Through a window of a car or a porthole of a ship, the world gains a new, cinematic vitality"[29] – the director's words actually need no further comment, clearly defining his attitude to film landscape which plays a role that is as important as the actors', (often being "naturals," actual inhabitants of the area). The filmmaker also directly demonstrates his perfect intuition regarding the manner in which landscape should function in the film, warning against its over-simplified use: "For the time being, landscape film is like multiplying by zero. We look for picturesqueness in it. Picturesqueness in cinema is zero, nothing, emptiness. The film is susceptible only to photogenicity. The picturesque and the photogenic coincides by pure

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[26] Ibid, p. 225.

[27] S. Gondolle, *Jean Epstein et la Bretagne, un ancrage légendaire*, in: (eds.) R. Hamery, E. Thouvenel, *Jean Epstein. Actualité et postérités,* Rennes 2016, p. 202.

[28] Ibid.

[29] J. Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma, Le cinématographe vue de l'Etna et autres écrits. Vol.II 1920-1928,* Ed. De l'Oeil, Montreuil, 2019, p. 135.

chance."[30] Therefore, photogenicity should not be used widely or only to increase the attractiveness of an image, whereas landscapes should be freed from their colloquial picturesqueness. Epstein directly expressed expectations for the film when writing: "We cannot exclude the landscape, we should adapt it."[31] "Landscape films are boring, and yet there is untapped aesthetic potential in landscape"[32] – concludes Laura Vicchi on the basis of his reflections.

In the most "theoretical" of his films, *The Storm Tamer*, Epstein highlighted both the photogenic potential of cinema and the values of the harsh landscape of Brittany, thanks to simple, common views: fishing boats on the shore, initially calm sea, distant dunes, people's faces, the wind which begins to intensify and raise the sea waves. However, his story develops towards drama due to the speed of changes in the environment recorded by the camera and the introduction of a sorcerer-protagonist who can tame the elements that threaten the inhabitants. "This man (…) is a symbol of the deep and mysterious connection between him and the landscape, which the cinema highlights"[33] – the observation of Vicchi and Chiara Tognolotti confirms the belief in the uniqueness of the role that the film should play in the study of reality, the relationship of human with the environment or, finally, the special idea of film landscape.

Jose Moure, the author of the introduction to the second volume of Epstein's collected writings from 1920-1928, made a very accurate synthesis of the director's reflection concerning the importance of photogenia in the creative process and in shaping the aesthetic and philosophical assumptions that guide the quest for uncovering the reality of things visible only thanks to the cinematographic machine. The researcher notes, among other things, that: "Photogenia is primarily the aesthetics of proximity (…) Photogenia is therefore the aesthetics of suggestion: 'we do not say, we indicate. What remains is a pleasure to explore and build. The essential feature of a photogenic gesture is that it never ends,' but as the director specifies, 'there is something

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[30] Ibid, p. 138.

[31] J. Epstein, op. cit., p. 136.

[32] L. Vichi, *Filmer le reél, élaborer une théorie*, in: (eds.) R. Hamery, E. Thouvenel, *Jean Epstein. Actualité et postérités,* Rennes 2016, p. 90.

[33] Ch. Tognolotti, L. Vicchi, *De la photogénie du reél à la théorie d'un cinéma au-delà du réel: archipel Jean Epstein*, Kaplan Torino 2020, p. 202

more than only gestures.'"[34] Moure concludes that photogenia – assuming the aesthetics of succession and mobility – results from the physiological conditions that cinema reproduces and which cinema itself formulates creating at the same time cinematic dramaturgy and poetics. This opens a path to the philosophy of cinema, which is based on the intensification of reality by means of the camera lens: "It will be a way of getting to know the world, capturing the animation of life in its constant flow and in the miracle of its presence. A way of thinking.[35] Although these considerations do not seem to relate directly to landscape issues, it is necessary to take into account previous observations and an assumption that Epstein – when writing about reality, and particularly about nature – actually meant landscape, the topic he was so interested in. For the artist, photogenia and landscape, while remaining closely related to each other, were the key to understanding the essence of realness and nature, so important in his film and written statements. Photogenia, which is the basis of his postulated aesthetics, lyrosophy and philosophy, is "knowledge squared,"[36] significantly exceeding the existing ways of cognition, because it is an eye without prejudices, devoid of habits, but endowed with analytical properties. However, most of Epstein's ideas were born in relation to living reality, especially since the 1930s, when the artist spent a lot of time in Brittany, observing the life of fishermen in the natural landscape. Epstein says with his specific directness that not every director is able to discover the nature of things: "A landscape photographed by one of the forty or four hundred directors devoid of personality (…) resembles what we saw photographed by another cinema locust (…) But a landscape staged by some personalities of cinema will in no way be identical to others."[37]

Conclusions

It is particularly worth emphasizing that Godard and Epstein share not only numerous analogies in terms of understanding landscape, but also (above

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[34] J. Moure, *Jean Epstein ou la ferveur du cinema*, in: J. Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma, Le cinématographe vue de l'Etna et autres écrits. Vol.II 1920-1928,* Ed. De l'Oeil, Montreuil, 2019, p. 20.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] J. Epstein, *Bonjour cinéma, Le cinématographe vue de l'Etna et autres écrits. Vol.II 1920-1928,* Ed. De l'Oeil, Montreuil, 2019, p. 289.

all) the need to create a philosophy of cinema. Both in their own texts and in the comments of the researchers of their work, there is a recurring philosophical and aesthetic trait indicating a need to express thoughts in cinema and through film in ways appropriate for each of the artists. If we were to compare the frames of Godard's *In Praise of Love* and several dozen years earlier "nature" films, such as *Mor Vran*, *Gold of the Seas* or the most famous *Storm Tamer*, it would turn out that in each of them the creators exhibit the same landscapes of rocky coasts or huge rocks emerging from the stormy sea, doing so in almost the same way (with a clear difference in terms of color and technique: Godard uses the form and color of Fauvists and a video image). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is something in the landscape itself that determines the most desirable way of its representation (even regardless of genre iconography).

At the same time, both Epstein and Godard make landscape a significant element of their output, they also demonstrate a distinct mode of presenting landscapes, which is thoughtful, original, and concurrently consistent with the pursued theory, or rather philosophy. They use wide shots, long takes, photographic or photogenic techniques in order to achieve the desired effect. This is probably why Godard's Helvetic landscapes (who shared Epstein's opinion on the banality of picturesqueness in cinema, by the way) and Epstein's Breton ones are somehow similar and certainly cannot be called just pretty or simply picturesque. They fulfill other roles, other functions, they are to discover something that is hidden behind the facade, under the surface of the film matter, triggering memory among the characters and emancipated thinking among the viewers (in case of Godard) or searching for the essence of nature and human in their real position (in case of Epstein).

Both directors were philosophers of cinema and of reality which needed to be learnt, and landscape was a kind of accessory allowing for this. Jacques Rancière combines the attitude of Epstein, Godard and Gilles Deleuze in the art of cinema narrative, noting a fascinating analogy: "However, if this dramaturgy is common to the enthusiastic pioneer of cinema and its disappointed historiographer, sophisticated philosopher and amateur theorist, it is because it is as important as the history of cinema as an art and object of thought (…) Cinema as an idea of art existed before as a technical means."[38] Therefore,

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[38] J. Rancière, *La fable cinématographique*, Ed. Du Seuil, 2001, p. 16.

the camera enables extracting an idea out of things – which some creators seem to do, ascribing in this respect a special role to the idea of film landscape. Jacques Aumont, summarizing certain landscape practices, notices an interesting relation: "the maximum zoom out distance – to the point from which the human presence becomes invisible for the camera – is accompanied by mental proximity."[39] Perhaps this is the secret of the directors' passion for presenting vast landscapes, changing the camera perspective and viewers' habits.

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[39] J. Aumont, *L'œil interminable*, Ed. de la Differance, Paris 2007, p. 57

Epstein's and Godard's Reflections on the Film Landscape

Reflections on landscape constitute a special subject of interest for artists dealing with the nature of image in culture and the status of film. The function and meaning of landscape as an independent aesthetic or meaning-generative unit become an important area of theoretical considerations for Jean Epstein and Jean-Luc Godard, among others. My intention is to look at the ways in which the directors' theoretical insights are employed in their deeds being theoretical essay films treated on an equal footing with texts. While interpreting the artists' attitude to landscape issues expressed in both their writings and films, I conclude that the author of *Passion* (1982) falls into the category of image-landscape thinking, whereas the director of *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) tends to explore reality by means of the film landscape.

Keywords: Jean Epstein, Jean-Luc Godard, landscape, theory

Refleksje Epsteina i Godarda na temat krajobrazu filmowego

Refleksje na temat krajobrazu stanowią szczególny przedmiot zainteresowania artystów zajmujących się naturą obrazu w kulturze i statusem filmu. Funkcja i znaczenie krajobrazu jako niezależnej jednostki estetycznej lub wytwórcy znaczenia stają się ważnym obszarem rozważań teoretycznych między innymi dla Jeana Epsteina i Jeana-Luca Godarda. Proponuję skonfrontować teoretyczne spostrzeżenia reżyserów na pejzaże filmowe oraz ich wykorzystywanie w praktykach artystycznych, traktując tym samym eseje filmowe na równi z teoretycznymi wypowiedziami. Interpretując stosunek artystów do kwestii krajobrazu, wyrażony zarówno w ich pismach, jak i filmach, dochodzę do wniosku, że autor filmu *Pasja* (1982) reprezentuje myślenie krajobrazem jako obrazem (w kontekście estetyki), podczas gdy reżyser filmu *Upadek domu Usherów* (1928) ma tendencję do badania rzeczywistości za pomocą krajobrazu filmowego (narzędzie poznania).

Słowa kluczowe: Jean Epstein, Jean-Luc Godard, krajobraz, teoria