

## **EKRAN 2004 – a review by Mateusz Werner, independent film critic**

### **1. PROGRAMME**

Each of the four sessions of the *Ekran* had its own specifics. The first, April session quite obviously was about reconnaissance, getting to know one another. It was very informative not only in the simple sense, but also because this was the time when the partakers learned the rules of the game, the requirements and the offer, what they can count on. The second, June session had a greater emotional load, since it was the first time for the participants to get behind the camera and make their key scenes from their projects. The third, September session perhaps gave them a bit more freedom, allowing them to master their individual skills rather than work on a particular task. The fourth, November session constituted a summary, evaluation, although was also the last chance to radically rethink one's project and to experimentally verify the quality of such changes. At the same time, however, the programme of the sessions was designed in such a way, that no session would be overloaded or monotonous because of one type of task. All four had elements of theory, practice, group and individual work, textual and visual aspects. Thanks to this kaleidoscope arrangement, it was possible to bear each ca. ten-day session confined to a rather small building of the School at the Film Factory grounds at 21, Chelmska street and still have fun.

The Warsaw *Ekran* is a whole-range and a multi-plot undertaking, also for the number of various workshop forms. Among them we may name lectures, such as the ones by Sokurov and Schlöndorff at the opening of the programme, or the one by Wajda devoted to Edward Hopper's works, the analytical interpretations of films and dramaturgical texts – such as Marczewski's lecture on Francis Coppola's "Conversation" and his own "Shivers," or the Zbigniew Brzoza's class on "The Lover" by Harold Pinter. Also the lectures on the subsequent stages of filmmaking, like Mateusz Rakowicz's class on story-board, Agnieszka Holland's one on casting or Milenia Fiedler's about editing. Another group of classes were the treatment, scene and script analysis sessions where various specialists led discussions with the *Ekran* participants, among them scriptwriter Mogens Rukov, script-doctor Marilyn Milgram, but also Polish poet Ernest Bryll, or German producer Ralph Schwingel. These meetings engaged each participant, forcing them to take the floor in the discussions, to present and defend their own concepts. The third kind of exercises were the both theoretical as well as practical individual classes – direct consultations on the developed projects with the masters –

Wajda, Schlöndorff, Marczewski or the specialists in a given aspect of film-development. There was also work with actors during a theatre rehearsal and on the set of two film scenes, concluded with their editing.

There were a lot of opinions praising the possibility of working in an international group of professional colleagues. This was the thing that attracted Mona Hoel to the *Ekran*. “Normally I work alone and I wanted for the first time to see how it is when you show your project at a very early stage to many different people.” – she confessed. Eleni in turn admitted that what she found most inspiring were to others’ ideas. Among them were ones that I had been thinking of but somehow couldn’t make up my mind. The fact that someone else had taken that risk encourages.” Dirk Schäfer had similar impressions: “the necessity of constant explaining and defending of your own ideas publicly was something difficult for me, but it made me more confident and generally stronger now.”

### **Shooting**

Majority of the *Ekran* participants were keen on filming the two selected scenes from their projects. The shooting took place during the second and fourth sessions and usually were done on location: some at the Film Factory in Chelmska street, some in rented or adapted private accommodations and the others in the city streets or at a railway station. The directors had professional teams and equipment at their disposal. Some of them, like Mona Hoel, Anne Wild or Dirk Schäfer came to Warsaw with their own actors, who had already been engaged for their parts in the future films. Some other ones, like Barbara Kulcsar, Dariusz Gajewski or Schäfer were able to convince Wojciech Marczewski to provide 35 mm film tape for their scenes. The shooting usually lasted longer than the schedule would show and at some occasions the conditions were extreme. For example the second scene from “Bunker 5” was shot by Eleni Ampelakiotou at night and at freezing temperatures. The tutors (Wajda, Marczewski among others) used to monitor each of the sets a couple of times, yet making sure they did not force themselves on the crew members, and rather asking questions than giving their own visions. This was, after all, supposed to be individual directing assignment, whose final effects were to be collectively judged at the end of the whole programme.

The attitudes of the participants varied as regards this test of their own projects in practice. Some of them, like Dirk Schäfer or Anne Wild tried to achieve the optimum perfection level that would make it possible for these scenes to be later on incorporated into the final films. Such ‘perfectionist’ attitude was especially prevailing during the fourth

session, when each project had already matured enough and some of the directors had decided not only to bring along from Germany or Norway their actors but also their scriptwriters, cinematographers or producers, as was the case with Anne Wild or Barbara Kulcsar. There were other participants, like Darek Gajewski or Eystein Abildsnes, who from the very beginning treated the possibility of shooting the scenes as a rehearsal and mistake lab, to experiment on. Gajewski admits, laughing, that after making these scenes he has many doubts about the script and the future film as at the beginning of the workshop. The shooting helped him in the negative way: he abandoned many of the ideas, which seem solid points of the story to him, and which turned out to be marginal, inessential. Abildsnes admits that the shooting changed his approach towards the main hero, whose psychological profile will be reformulated. Eleni treated her work in a similar way; she wanted to dispel her doubts about the dialogues being so long. Two boys, sitting in a car and talking all the time – will it come out natural? Will the viewer be interested? Will the young actors be able to handle the whole material? The promising end effects verified her questions positively and Eleni was leaving Warszawa very contented: “when we came to the first meeting of the *Ekran* we only had the treatment. Now we have a mature and tested script and can do the serious job.”

Undoubtedly, one of the most important moments of the whole *Ekran* was the final discussion of the shot scenes. It was moderated by Wojciech Marczewski and the guests that day were Maciej Strzembosz and Ralph Schwingel, film producers from Poland and Germany.

During the discussion the most highly praised was Dirk Schäfer’s scene from “Real,” though one could hear doubts about the status of the fragments showing the dream world of the heroine. “Whose dreams are you going to show us?” – asked Maciej Strzembosz – “the mother’s or the daughter’s?” It turned out that for the majority of viewers this issue was also unclear. Schäfer replied that the person dreaming is the daughter, yet he admitted that the way he showed the dream imaginary world may have posed questions. Other participants highlighted a certain constructive artificiality of the diegesis. Harry Flöter said that for him “it should have been closer to life, dirtier.” Schäfer defended himself claiming that this was his intention corresponding to his aesthetic sensitivity: “today everything is ‘naturally soiled’ and when one sees it in every film on TV or in the cinema, a need arises to make something different, to create something on the verge of real, something that would not be ashamed of its own creational quality.”

Another scene that received as much praise as “Real” was Anne Wilde’s project scene for her “Blue Room”. Especially Ralph Schwingel dwelled on the effective mis-en-scene,

actors' performances and the cinematography. The scene showed an unexpected meeting of two women, who come across each other in the flat of their lover. They soon realise they are their own rivals and the man has been cheating on them. The actresses played brilliantly and the scene was very attractive. Darek Gajewski's scene, on the other hand, of the mother and daughter conversation at a railway station platform caught everybody's attention for the well-selected music score. A certain change to this presentation of scenes was introduced with Anna Jadowska's screening of freshly pre-edited materials which she had just brought from location of her film "Me Now", with whose project she first came for the initial sessions of the *Ekran* and now was in the midst of the shooting process. One has to admit that the material we saw was quite promising, with climate well corresponding with the atmosphere of the script. Polish province has been well captured with the naturalistic camera, but the lighting and the music violently shifted the overall impression and made the presented anti-aesthetic pictures unreal, inviting also the subjectivity and emotionality of the mysterious heroine. The first impressions of the viewers were pretty encouraging and the young Polish filmmaker's smile was expressive of satisfaction.

### ?? **Script development**

The scripts prepared by the partakers of the workshop were tested during the *Ekran* shooting sessions. They were also tested during public discussions. One of them took place during the November class with Mogens Rukov, a scriptwriter from Denmark and a co-founder of Dogma, and Marilyn Milgram, a script-doctor from Great Britain. I had an impression that, through their harsh and sceptical approach, they wanted to evoke emotions from the participants. It might have looked aggressive at times, impertinent or mean, yet in reality it was a simulation of a real relationship between the creator who is supposed to convince the whole world to his work and the producer or the viewer, who grumbles and fusses for he/she has been spoiled by the excess of the attractions offered on screens. I recall a discussion on the psychological drama piece called "Real" (by Dirk Schäfer), when Rukov harshly interrupted Dirk's short summary of the plot and the ideas: "Let's not talk of scene interpretations, but about the scenes themselves, or just the story." Marczewski backed Rukov: "I have a problem with a fundamental issue here – what are going to finally see on the screen?" After a while Schäfer- who patiently explained the drama of the two heroines of his film, a young girl who has been in coma for years and the mother who's been looking after her by herself. The mother is desperate enough to challenge the daughter with a threat of

ethanasia. Dirk was challenged with a shower of questions: what are the characters' needs, what are their intentions? What is their relationship? Why is the viewer supposed to watch? Is there any conclusion to the matters touched upon? The questions were very direct and pressing. They revealed to the author the area of his own unawareness of the script – in his vision the film did not have any logical gaps, everything seemed obvious. After this harsh exchange Schäfer must have become aware of the fact that, from the viewer's perspective (represented here by the script-doctors), there exists a significant difference between the designed intentional mystery of the plot, which can be calmly delight in, and the narrative or psychological vagueness being a result of the director's indecision and leading to the viewer's inescapable confusion.

What nobody expected was the course of the discussion on Birthe Templin's script entitled "Windmills of Your Mind," right after Schäfer's project analysis. Templin, reminded of the time limitations, hastily yet efficiently summarizing the story of Paula, a German girl, who discovers her grandma's nazi past during a trip to Argentina. When telling the story, she never mentioned the character of Margarete, Paula's mother. Rukov pointed it out and asked why? "Because I was in a hurry." - replied Birthe. "If that is the case" – said Rukov – "then this character is not really important. You should think about it." Marilyn Milgram in turn focused on the fact that the audience will not be really surprised with grandma's nazi past once they learn Paula goes to Argentina: "this automatically implies some nazi associations." After these initial remarks, Marczewski asked: "What is this film about?" Templin replied in German: "*Totschweigen und Schuld*" ("about deathly silence and feeling of guilt"). "And why do you want to tell us this story?", asked Marczewski. The reply was surprisingly quick: "Because my grandparents won't tell me the whole truth about their past. And it's not only my problem".

### **Editing consultancy**

A good and ubiquitous spirit of the workshop was Milenia Fiedler, an experienced editor and tutor, who gave editing consultations. What attracted attention was her attitude to the initial editing of the scenes – full of submissiveness towards the director's intentions, no matter how doubtful they were. This attitude was at the same time firm, as regards the rules of narration and scene composition, character construction, creating the atmosphere and respecting the rhythm. In her comments, Milenia stressed the importance of the techniques of dealing with the limitations of the available material, in concord with the rule that the scene is

supposed to be better than the sum of the takes included. The foundation of this technique is the ability to eliminate all these elements from the material, which weaken the whole piece, even if in the script or according to the initial intentions these elements seemed crucial. An example of such a situation was a scene shot during the fourth session of *Ekran* by Eystein Abildsnes, where one of the actresses could not manage her lines – they sounded artificial and theatrical – and it all came to light during the first screening in the editing room. Milenia, without hesitation, proposed such a sequence of the cuts that would almost completely eliminate the dialogues uttered by the unconvincing actress. It appeared that all the information that a viewer will need can be easily transferred without words, by means of in-frame movement, close-ups, micro-observations of gestures and mimes. The scene was saved with no damage to the course of action. The ideal cooperation of Milenia with her directors had an interesting outcome: one of the participants of the *Ekran*, Fulvio Bernasconi engaged his editing tutor as the editor of his recently finished television documentary film about a football club in Africa which recruits talented kids to train them to play for European football teams.

### **Tapes of truth**

The most important element of the 3<sup>rd</sup> session was the preparation of scenes selected from Harold Pinter's "Lover," which were later on analyzed with Wojciech Marczewski. These rehearsals with actors had another aim, however. Their real objective was to record on cameras how given directors worked with actors, what methods they used or to find out, to their shame, that there was no method at all. "The Tapes of Truth" where long hours of director's efforts were recorded gave a faithful merciless picture of all the mistakes and weaknesses visible when working with actors: above all the excessive wordiness and the indecision, and little precision in commanding the actors. Watching one's own mistakes in such a convention gives one a feeling of liberating distance, makes one laugh at themselves and gives an impulse to work on mastering one's own skills. The one who did not let himself be caught in the "candid camera" was Dariusz Gajewski, who treated the test light-heartedly and left the actor on their own. What was funniest, Gajewski's actors, who had total freedom of cutting the text's unnecessary parts and of its interpretation – played their parts at the same good level as the actors from the other groups, who had been rehearsing all day long. Marczewski's comment about the recorded rehearsals was rather reserved. He pointed, that what amazed him was the fact that in each of the interpretations of the play the characters are

very correct and rational. What he lacked was madness and humour. “This is characteristic and tells me more about you than about Pinter’s play.” – he concluded.

## 2. TUTORS

I remember two situations with Andrzej Wajda during the full group discussion of the treatments within the confines of the first session of the *Ekran*. Both were most characteristic of his work with students. When working on the “Me Now” project of a Polish director Anna Jadowska, all the present participants accused the author of lacking any clear motivation for her heroine, who leaves her nice and young husband. “Do you know why she leaves her husband? – they asked Jadowska – “There must be some reason for us to believe in this story, so that you can grip us with this story.” “Perhaps this guy was too nice?” –Agnieszka Holland was thinking aloud – “it happens nowadays that girls leave nice, peaceful guys because the relationship lacks the sparks.” Jadowska was not able to defend herself convincingly, either she did not want to or she could not justify the decision made by her heroine. And then Wajda cut short the discussion: “we do not understand the motivation of the girl, we do not know why she leaves the guy and this is very good, this is original, we do not need to know all of this at all – this shall be the mystery of this film. However, we should choose how to show the girl’s doings – with an approving eye or not.” This remark totally changed the course of the further discussion. It appeared that what at first looked as the greatest weakness of the project is its strongest asset. There were even voices comparing Jadowska’s script to Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Avventura*.

Another moment, which I remember because of Wajda’s voice, was the discussion on German director Birthe Templin’s treatment “Windmills of Your Mind” about a young German girl’s ups and downs and her discovery of the nazi past of her closest family. During the debate on what would be the best way to show the drastic past which may become the present, there was criticism of the subject itself. There was even a provoking remark made by one of the German participants that “there is nothing *funny* in nazism anymore so there is no point in making any other films about it today.” Then Wajda told a wartime nazi occupation story when he used to work in a German designing office as a scribe and once was caught reading “Madame Bovary” on his duty. The German overseer could have done anything with him, shooting him down included, yet he asked young Wajda to pull out his hands and he smacked them with a wooden ruler. According to Wajda, the overseer did for the sense of the German civilizing mission to teach the savages how to work properly. The senior Germans

have not renounced this feeling of national superiority, the feeling which is stronger than any historical expiation. “And this is worth filming.” – Wajda concluded and added that this entire story should be told through the present, not in flashbacks: “flashbacks to historical events are always weaker in terms of narration.” These two Wajda’s interventions show how the pragmatism of a craftsman is inseparably linked with moral responsibility in his thinking on cinema.

All the *Ekran* activities involving discussions of treatments, scenes and scripts, and those where the participants judged one another’s filmed scenes had specific atmosphere, which would not have been achieved without omnipresent Wojciech Marczewski, the main animator of the workshop. This atmosphere was most felicitously depicted by Dariusz Gajewski who talked of a sort of human interaction, if at all possible in a group of artists, which is totally aimed at disinterested exchange of knowledge and sensitivity; it is void of the egotistic competition element. In such conditions only, where all the comments are assumed to improve a colleague’s project or a given film piece, and not the speaker’s self-esteem at somebody’s expense, only then can the conversation be sincere and help solve real problems. These were the conditions of discussions at the film cooperatives, a specific invention of the communist time Polish film industry, also known as ‘*zespół filmowy*’ (film team), where colleagues respected not the party-ruled state-patron, but the authority of fellow artists. Such was the case with, among others, the “Zespół Filmowy X” of Andrzej Wajda, or with “Zespół Filmowy Tor” of Stanislaw Różewicz, where such artists as Wojciech Marczewski, Krzysztof Zanussi, Agnieszka Holland, Krzysztof Kieslowski came from. The atmosphere of work on film projects was not a result of financial motivations, but of particular environmental solidarity, which might be difficult to understand nowadays, if one had not experienced it on their own. No doubt, the *Ekran* workshops organised at the Master School of Film Directing in Warsaw inherit, in a way, those unique methods of artistic cooperation. Mainly, as I believe, thanks to the efforts of Wojciech Marczewski, who did his best to convey the spirit of kind, friendly reflection on other filmmakers’ projects. Eystein Abildsnes defined it as “an ability to confirm you in your good ideas, and not negating the bad ones.” Dirk Schäfer then called it “the great gift of communication”, which consists, according to him, in showing a lot of confidence in someone else’s ideas, even if these ideas stray from one’s own preferences and taste. Even in situations of an open dispute over individual projects – when rhetoric tempers prevailed, especially in case of public discussions with Mogens Rukov and Maciej Strzembosz, during the fourth session of the *Ekran* – the presence of Marczewski made the



aggressive critiques become conventional conversations, not manifestations of aversion aimed at a given author.

### **Agnieszka Holland's workshop**

One cannot describe Agnieszka Holland as lacking expressive personality either – she is able to speak her mind. Her firm tone was always an important reference point, polarising the group and setting the temperature of the discussion. Mona Hoel stated that meeting Holland meant a lot to her for the feminine aspect of directing. “Feminine, not feminist,” as she emphasized, one that is void of ideological bias, one that is, however, a “personal exemplification of the women’s distinction in this profession.” Holland’s abilities were displayed in the analysis of the casting process (during the second session of the *Ekran*), as the key moment of the pre-production stage. Holland divided the participants, and a couple of invited professional actors, into eight pairs who were to present a short dialogue scene. On the basis of these rehearsals, the participants were to collectively select these ‘actors’ who would best suit to the intentions of the scene’s author. After the first rehearsals it seemed to me that it would never work. The level of the ‘actors’ was that of a primary school theatre. Most of them were embarrassed to act, others, in turn, were not able to repeat these elements of their proposals which had been already approved, nor were they able to correct their own errors. Chaos began to creep in. I was sure the experiment had failed. It appeared, however, that all this mess gave birth to two or three proposals that were worth working on and soon, thanks to Holland’s precise remarks, the participants were able to appoint the optimum performers for the scene and they were not only the professional actors. Holland proved that, even in a difficult situation of a limited range of weak or really poor proposals, one is able to approach the optimum solutions. There is one condition: one has to formulate his or her expectations clearly and be able to verify them by means of specific directing interventions which test a given actor’s capability and creative potential.

### **Slawomir Idziak's workshop**

Slawomir Idziak, one of the best Polish directors of photography, was a lecturer during the fourth session of the *Ekran*. He ran a three day workshop, where he discussed most of the problems of filmmaking, not limiting himself, however, to purely cinematographic issues. The foundation for his discussion on working with actors, editing, cooperation of the director with the crew on the set was the collectively seen Krzysztof Kieslowski’s “The Double Life Of

Veronique,” where Idziak worked as the director of photography. Idziak focused on a few mis-en-scene rehearsals from selected scenes, arranged by the workshop participants. The workshop was extraordinarily authoritative. Idziak is a demanding and critical perfectionist, he believes that each element of the film matter can be better justified, prepared and achieved. Idziak accused the authors of the prepared scenes of lacking visible premise in their interpretations. In case of Kieslowski’s film it was for example “follow your inner voice.” The existence of such a premise is necessary for the intellectual and emotional coherence of the whole work, and Idziak stressed it at numerous occasions. He also criticised the hastiness of the participants’ stagings and question the enormous number of camera positions used by the authors, especially in close-ups of the intimate encounter of the characters. “It is easier to shorten the material on the editing bench than to lengthen it,” he kept repeating and, therefore, “you have to keep the camera rolling longer than it is necessary.” “The main problem of most European films I get to see is the lack of consistency in artistic decision-making. You can clearly see that the director was changing his mind a hundred times while shooting on the set.” This opinion related also to the partakers’ scenes. Yet, one could easily sense in the room the sentimental spirit of Idziak’s memories of his cooperation and friendship with Krzysztof Kieslowski, which, as I understand, has been for him an example of ideal balance of competence and responsibility between the director and the cinematographer, who also shared artistic goals and tastes.

### 3. PARTICIPANTS

The most noticeable group of participants were, obviously, the authors of the submitted projects: the scriptwriters and the future directors. They were often accompanied by producers, who declared their commitment for the projects, and by other film team members, like the cinematographers and actors, especially during the shooting sessions. For instance, Martin Rosefeld and Mathias Schwerbrock, the script-writer and the producer of Dirk Schäfer’s film, took part in most of the sessions devoted to script analysis. Schäfer also invited a well-known German actress Angela Winkler to work with him on the set during the shooting session. He confessed that she was his dream actress for the principal part from the very beginning. Similarly, Anne Wilde brought along a whole team: two actresses, a woman cinematographer and the producer of the project. In turn, the authors of the ‘Bunker 5’ project, Harry Floter and Eleni Ampelakiotou established an ‘author company’ in which both

of them interchangeably play the roles of scriptwriters and directors. Also 'Tymek' is a work of two authors: Eystein Abildsnes and Jakub Smolarski, who jointly made all the crucial decisions concerning the script, and co-operated on the set. It seems that such a form of the workshop, where project development is close to the real team creative process in film production conditions, is what best meets the requirements of the workshop - being a creative incubator, and not only a theoretical simulator.

What were the expectations of the participants of *Ekran* coming to Warsaw? For example, Mona Hoel, a Norwegian director with a considerable output (currently she is working upon her fourth story), decided to come here just because of the names of Wajda and Sokurov; she wanted to meet people who would give her some "mental reinforcement," which she needs preparing a film about "the problem of the decline of mental values in the materialistic Western civilization." She describes the meeting with Sokurov as 'utterly essential' and explains that gave her courage, because in Norway when she is searching for her own, non-commercial way of artistic expression, she struggles with many hardships and a sense of loneliness.

A German director and scriptwriter Harry Flöter was talking about his expectations from the *Ekran* in a similar way: "The most captivating in *Ekran* was the Eastern aspect of this project (...). Because of the contact with people, coming to Poland was more important than any proper work on the scenario or other practical activities." Flöter, a graduate of the Cologne film school, defines the main difference between West and East by the different attitude to the visual side of a film and the dramaturgy of a story. Flöter believes that the necessity of playing the everyday game with the communist censorship forced the Eastern European artists to create a specific visual code containing the extraordinary, magic, persuasive power that made him fascinated with Polish films. He wanted, he said, "to have a closer look at these people, get acquainted with their philosophy and craftsmanship. When the *Ekran* finished, he summarized this philosophy in a statement that "the question 'what' is more important than the question 'how'."

It is interesting that Eleni Ampelokiotou, Harry's partner, the co-director and co-writer of his project "Bunker 5", belonged to another group of participants, who took part in the *Ekran* without any particular expectations. In the case of the *Ekran*, the most enticing for her was the fully professional possibility of shooting several trial scenes during the script writing stage, which made it possible to check whether one's ideas work on the screen.

Dariusz Gajewski, one of the two Polish artists invited to the *Ekran* and the winner of the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia in 2003, expressed his opinion in a similar, quite practical

way. Gajewski declared straightforwardly: “I appeared here with the purpose of making two scenes from a project that actually does not exist yet and such a luxurious possibility I am not able to overvalue.” What surprises is the fact that both Gajewski and Eleni found the meeting with Andrzej Wajda most surprising of all. Eleni was struck by the “passion for storytelling” and the “*dramatic fire*” of the creator of *Kanal* and, as she says, the “way how he is able to enrich each scene.” In admiration, Gajewski reported his consultation with Wajda on the project: “within 5 minutes [Wajda] extracted the essence of my project, all that was important in it, and, hitting the nail on the head, he pointed: make a film about that, make a film about a girl meeting her father, keeping the unity of time and place. What struck me was his way of thinking, how quickly he is able to get to the key issue when analysing a scene or a whole script and on the way getting rid of everything that dims the picture, all that is of minor importance. I have never before seen such way of thinking.” Dirk Schäfer from Germany also has no doubts about the key element of the *Ekran* – it was the possibility to shoot two scenes from the projects they were working on and that tempted him to come to Warsaw. “What assured me that I was in the right place was the first meeting with Sokurov. You cannot meet anybody like that in Germany.” – said Schäfer. “The contact with Polish filmmakers like Wajda, Marczewski, Holland or Zebrowski, who really love cinema, who have survived the hard time and have managed to make great films – this gives strength, then you have a feeling that they share your passion. And that made the difference between the *Ekran* and other workshops in which I have taken part so far, where they tried to teach me how to make a solid product and nothing more, where actually I lost the feeling that what I do is mine.”

Considering these above accounts of the *Ekran* partakers, one may conclude that there were basically three elements that attracted them: the above-reconstructed “Eastern aspect” of thinking about cinema, the unique offer of shooting two scenes from the prepared projects and the possibility to meet masters of directing as the teachers of the trade.

#### 4. EAST AND WEST MET IN WARSAW

One of the first meetings within the confines of the Warsaw *Ekran*: Andrzej Wajda, the patron of the Master School of Film Directing, and next to him the eminent guests – Alexander Sokurov and Volker Schlöndorff are sitting opposite a group of young German, Polish, Swiss and Norwegian filmmakers. It is hard to find a scene that would reflect the sense of the whole undertaking more vividly. East meets West halfway between, right here, in

Warsaw. It soon came to light, as regards film art, what these geographical terms stand for: it was enough to listen to the masters to notice striking differences in their attitudes towards cinema, towards the students, their creative perspectives and the simple differences in behaviour and the way they handled the audience. Volker Schlöndorff appeared as an elegant witty man of fashion, showering with anecdotes, a brilliantly arguing sword-player. With his flawless English, he pointed each thought with felicitous examples, his conversational cleverness brought to mind the style of international press or diplomatic conferences. Sokurov seemed to be his opposite. Concentrated, with his face clouded over, through an interpreter he conveyed his artistic *credo* in short, seemingly interrupted sentences. Neither had he tried to seduce the audience with smart anecdotes, nor amuse them, cracking some jokes. He delivered his manifesto *ex cathedra*, openly expressing things that no-one, for fear of appearing ridiculous, dares to touch upon even in the subtlest hints: what art, or film art – in particular – is about, who an artist is, what their duties and obligations to art are and what their responsibility for what they do is. From the ‘academically correct’ point of view – a scandal. And yet everybody, fascinated, listened to this prophet. The tone of this personal testimony, backed by a long list of magnificent films, placed Sokurov’s speech beyond the rational exchange of arguments – it could be either accepted as a whole, or rejected.

This was not the case with Schlöndorff’s speech. He, in accordance with the current bon-ton, did all the possible to avoid expressing any judgements or generalisations, which would come from his own convictions. Assuming it obvious that it is each participant’s individual role to judge what they consider to be art and what role they see for themselves as artists – he focused on issues of professional standards in the trade of a film director, whose most important vocation is always to make a high-quality product, no matter whether we think of auteur or popular cinema.

No wonder that a controversy arose between Sokurov and Schlöndorff. The author of “Mother and Son” attacked the global audiovisual industry for corrupting artists and viewers, for the upbringing of a new type of man who will not be able to understand his own humanity, all the more – he will not be able to self-improve. Quite the contrary – the new man will subside to the state of reiterated animality, coming to terms with the world, whose motto is: “I must kill in order to survive.” According to Sokurov, the artists who follow the commercial imperative of attractiveness, making violence beautiful and justified, accelerate the degradation of these areas of culture where true art may arise, art that would give hope and spite inescapable death and the natural necessity of killing. At many times, the Russian artist emphasized the responsibility of those who visualize and confront audiences with violence,

accusing his Western European colleagues of not being aware of this danger. Schlöndorff reacted with a reminder of the historical sources of the European Union, which now is trying to construct a universal cultural code, a code of its basic values. Obviously, this code poses a threat of standardization, which is so distressing for Sokurov, yet – *per saldo* – of lesser significance than the language of local fundamentalism. This controversy, after all covered with jokes and anecdotes, was most characteristic for the confrontation of the two artists.

Andrzej Wajda, the third of the masters, in a strange way appears here as an [embodiment of] synthesis of the two antagonising artistic approaches and philosophies. When he talks of film, he uses a very pragmatic, professional language, drawing attention to technical details, e.g. the limitations resulting from the demands and habits of the audiences and from the very peculiarity of the film material. When discussing the scripts and treatments during the *Ekran* analysis sessions, Wajda would most often bring young authors down to earth by making purely craftsman's remarks, asking them about the likelihood of the events and characters, their meaningfulness and attractiveness and even about the costs of production. This pragmatic language sounds familiar for the Western European film-makers, appealing to the system of ideas and values which one can nohow logically negate. However, it is just a means enabling Wajda to win confidence of the students as well as winning something else, something imperceptible at first glance: the confrontation of an artist with the basic question of the sense of what they want to propose in their piece of work. But this confrontation takes place beyond the lecture, in silence, on one's own. That it is necessary, is clearly demonstrated by Andrzej Wajda's best films. He is not a prophet when he talks of cinema, but when he creates it.

Therefore, if I were to summarize, in a few sentences, the essence of this "Eastern school of thinking about film," which young authors from Germany, Switzerland or Norway encountered in Warsaw, it would be most probably formulated in the following way:

*?? The term "East" is not a geographic category but refers to a state of mind which can exist anywhere. However, from the statistical point of view, it can be found more often in Warsaw or Kiev than in London, which is, obviously, determined culturally.*

*?? It is a creative attitude treating the domain as vocation, a gift, favour, not just a job and intellectual competence which is a sum of trained skills. From this point of view, a piece of art is not a "well-made product" but an object where "something more" is manifested, a kind of surplus that can be variously defined, variously perceived*

*depending on the kind of one's sensitivity as a "metaphysical experience", "hope", "beauty" or even "the passion of story-telling."*

?? *A characteristic feature of such an attitude is the sense of responsibility for the piece of art and its message, responsibility before the world. It does not end in the professional responsibility before the producer and the audience for the product, which should comply with given market requirements. It results from a different understanding of an artist, who is not defined as someone "to be hired" by the "cultural industry" system.*

?? *This creative attitude has its consequences in the approach toward the creative process that is not longer a general and repeatable film production scheme, but every time it becomes an existential and cognitive experience, whose course is not fully predictable and to whose unexpected outcomes one should stay open. This aspect is particularly important, as it involves a lesson of spontaneity in reacting to environment, induces improvisation which enables to take advantage of unforeseen circumstances, instead of rejecting them as an "alien element" etc.*

Mateusz Werner