

THE ROLE OF THE CAMERA IN WOJCIECH SMARZOWSKI'S FILMS¹

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The most important inspiration for this sketch was my desire to return to the issue that I had undertaken in 2003, which resulted in the article *Who is Favored by the Digital Cameras? (Komu cyfra sprzyja?)*. Back in the day I pointed out that digital cameras shortened the waiting time for the opportunity to make a debut film, and secondly, became significant props² enabling the protagonists to communicate – this is what was supposed to happen for example in Iwona Siekierzyńska's *My Baked Chickens (Moje pieczone kurczaki, 2002)*, where the conversation between the conflicted couple was replaced by playing the clips recorded by the wife. I wrote 'was supposed to happen', because the theme of a 'digital camera acting in a film' was carried out in a way that seemed to be ham-fisted – the protagonist attended film school, which meant that making materials did not stem from her desire to rebuild her marriage, but instead preparing them for a school project. The way digital camera was 'cast'³ in Łukasz Barczyk's debut *I'm Looking at You, Mary (Patrzę na ciebie, Marysiu, 2000)* was much more convincing and smooth – in this film, it serves as a medium through which the protagonist reaches his girlfriend, learns more about

¹ I would like to thank Bartek Piotrowski for his help in writing this paper, but above all I want to express my gratitude to Piotr Sobociński jr, who patiently endured all my questions.

² Of course, there were also films in which the digital camera appearing on the screen served only as a prop informing the viewer about the social status and wealth of the presented characters, thus showing the fact that a camera has become one of the items commonly used by Poles.

³ I wrote about 'casting' the camera, because in this sketch I will deal with the camera that 'appears' in the film, rather than the cameras used to make them.

the person with whom he had been in a relationship and lived with for several years, yet, in fact, knowing very little about her⁴. Michał learns about Marysia's desires, sympathies and dreams only when he points at her the lens of an amateur camera⁵. In Mariusz Front's *Double Portrait* (*Portret podwójny*, 2001), the digital camera serves as a notebook, which contains 'sketches' of Warszawa, being thus a full-fledged character in the film, as well as very personal images⁶, such as the face of the sleeping protagonist filmed by her boyfriend. In addition, the size of digital cameras and the fact that it requires a small amount of light⁷, which lowers the requirements concerning

⁴ *I'm Looking at You, Mary* was shot using a Beta and a tiny DV digital camera, Kacper Lisowski was the cinematographer, and Karina Kleszczewska worked with the actual camera.

⁵ I decided to go with the word 'amateur', because this is how DV digital cameras were perceived at that time, despite the fact that they were also used by professionals, including the authors of *Double Portrait* (Jacek Januszyk, Mariusz Front and Elżbieta Piekacz), awarded at the Gdynia Festival in 2001 for 'searching for new forms of expression', and the aforementioned creators of *I'm Looking at You, Mary*. It seems particularly important to me that *Edi* (2002) by Krzysztof Ptak and Piotr Trzaskalski, awarded the Golden Frog (*ex aequo* with *Road to Perdition* shot on film by Conrad Hall and Sam Mendes, later also distinguished with an Academy Award for cinematography) at the 2002 Camerimage Festival, was made mainly using a DV camera. In the decision of the jury of Camerimage, equating the motion picture shot on film with one made using a DV camera, I see evidence of the introduction of digital recording to the world of big cinematography.

⁶ A similar situation occurs in Marcin Koszałka's documentary *It will Be Somehow* (*Jakoś to będzie*, 2004), a sequel to the famous *Such a Beautiful Son I Gave a Birth To* (*Takiego pięknego syna urodziłam*), which ends with a clip of the face of the director's daughter, Zosia, who at that point was several years old, kissing the lens.

⁷ Although it still has to be very precisely planned: 'The film is far still more tolerant of exposure errors, especially of overexposure of the bright parts of the image. Paradoxically, when filming using standard film, it is easier to organise lighting on set. When it comes to digital recording, this has to be done with far more precision. On the other hand, apart from the obvious savings in time and money, a digital camera works infinitely better in difficult lighting conditions thanks to its impressive sensitivity' (Bukowiecki 2002: 15).

set lighting, made it easier to work with amateurs, who in the past could have felt scared by the size of the camera itself, as well as the lighting setup used on a film set. I mention this because both in *Edi* (2002), as well as in *Double portrait* and *Junk* (*Złom*, 2002)⁸, in addition to professionals, there were amateur actors, thanks to whom the productions gained a unique authenticity.

These were the results of my reconnaissance in 2003, when filmmakers still used DV digital cameras (small cameras associated with amateur filmmakers), or HD cameras (see: Bukowiecki 2002: 14-15) – such a camera was used to shoot *Pornography* (*Pornografia*), directed by Jan Jakub Kolski (2003), featuring camera work by Krzysztof Ptak – a precursor, pioneer and master of digital cameras and digital image processing, among others. Today, in 2019, making films with digital cameras no longer surprises anyone and is not treated as an artistic fad or the only chance to make a debut, since along the way, two new types of digital cameras were developed, enabling filmmakers to record images with quality equal to that achieved with an analogue camera and light-sensitive film: Red Epic and Arri Alexa. The production of films using digital cameras has become standard, which is why in this article I will no longer focus on the form of films shot this way, but on the role of the cameras ‘cast’ in films, for example those appearing in the hands of the characters in the films by Wojciech Smarzowski. I decided to take a closer look at this director’s films because, first of all, I consider him to be the most interesting filmmaker in Polish cinema after 1989. Secondly, because as often as the axe, which is considered an almost obligatory prop in the films by the author of *The Rose* (*Róża*)⁹, the hands of the protagonists of Smarzowski’s films hold... a camera¹⁰.

⁸ *Złom*, dir. Radosław Markiewicz, cinematography by Dariusz Radecki. Cf. Lebecka 2002; Sendecka 2002.

⁹ Cf. *Tajemnice „Drogówki”*, czyli czy wiesz, że..., additional materials on a *Drogówka* (*Traffic Department*) DVD, graphic design: E. Wastkowska, project coordinator: M. Kosińska, producers: R. Kijak and M. Skowrońska, Agora SA 2013.

¹⁰ Three of the five films he has made to date have been recorded with the use of digital cameras: *The Dark House* (2009) – Sony ex 1; *Traffic Department* (2013) – mainly Red Epic (I will return to the issue of the types of cameras used in the production of this film in the further part of the paper); *The Mighty Angel*

The clips recorded by the cameras used by Smarzowski's film characters¹¹ always reveal the truth. Sometimes it's about 'something' recorded accidentally, which was the case in his debut *The Wedding (Wesele)*, where the Cameraman, who is trying to collect himself in the toilet after being assaulted, learns about the price for which Janusz married Kasia. In another case, in *The Dark House (Dom zły)*, a crime scene investigation, the aim of which is not to find out the truth, but to accuse the detained man of crimes he did not commit, becomes a kind of grotesque *dance macabre* performed by police officers. It is precisely because of their carelessness and being too sure that they could do anything they want, the camera – held by one of them – would record scraps revealing the true intentions of the law enforcement officers. In *Traffic Department (Drogówka)*, on the other hand, materials recorded by one of the officers, enabling him to blackmail the perpetrators of road traffic offences (which brought him considerable profits, but also led to his murder), are used by another police officer as evidence of his own innocence. In *The Mighty Angel (Pod Mocnym Aniołem)*, the images from the hospital CCTV system give the film its authenticity¹², since they often clarify and verify the visions of patients suffering from alcoholism.

The actions of the protagonists of Smarzowski's films are devoid of the gesture of Filip Mosz featured in *Camera Buff (Amator)* by Kieślowski, where, in the final act of the film, the protagonist points the lens at himself, so that after portraying the world, he can look at himself as well – because Smarzowski's world is not about gaining self-awareness. This is only true

(2014) – Red Epic. Only *The Wedding* (2004) and *The Rose* (2011) were shot with an analogue camera (what is more, it was even the same model – the Arri bl3 camera) on film. *The Dark House* also features fragments made using a Krasnogorsk camera, which records on a 16 mm film. *Volhynia (Wołyń)*, 2016) was also produced using digital camera – this time it was Alexa. (Here I would like to thank the cinematographer of *The Rose*, *Traffic Department* and *Volhynia*, Piotr Sobociński jr, and the camera operator in *The Mighty Angel*, Bartosz Piotrowski for information regarding the cameras used).

¹¹ In *Traffic Department*, the recordings included in the film were shot by the actors; see: Wernio 2012.

¹² I will talk more about the importance, role and significance of authenticity in the fragment devoted to *Traffic Department*.

of the Cameraman in *The Wedding*, who ends the filming saying: ‘I wanted to do things right, the result was as always’.

The camera in the hands of Smarzowski’s protagonists is not an object, but instead it becomes another protagonist, a silent one perhaps, but able to look and then convey the image. It serves as an impartial witness. It seems to be a medium living its own life and therefore able to reveal the truth, even against the intentions of those filming. Perhaps I might be overanalyzing it, but I believe that the belief of the director in the image – which, according to Chris Menges, cannot lie¹³ – is a side effect of Wojciech Smarzowski’s studies at the Cinematography Department of the Łódź Film School.

Despite being a trained cinematographer, Wojciech Smarzowski quickly realized that he is more interested in working with actors rather than manipulating lights and cameras, that he is more of a director, rather than cinematographer. He debuted by making *The Wedding*. Story has it that he first realized what medium would shorten the waiting time for his debut, and then he found the so-called social justification for using it (see: Taras 2007: 258-260). Of course, it turned out to be a digital camera. After that, all he needed to do was to create a list of events that have always had a digital camera. The wedding turned out to be the most meaningful and at the same time made it possible to refer to Wyspiański’s work¹⁴, who – as the future would show – would become an artist of great importance to Smarzowski, a director who is so interested in reinterpreting and perhaps even deconstructing myths that we consider important. When I asked Piotr Sobociński jr – the cinematographer with whom Smarzowski worked the most often on making his feature films (and judging by the results – I hope this cooperation will last as long as possible) – if he could confirm

¹³ Chris Menges – an eminent cinematographer, former camera operator for documentaries, responsible for making Ken Loach’s *Kes* or Roland Joffe’s *The Killing Fields* and *The Mission*; see: Taras 2015: 5-8.

¹⁴ Smarzowski’s directorial debut features a statement ‘You must wear shoes at a wedding’, which is uttered by Wojnar, after he was robbed and assaulted; however, the references to Wyspiański’s art works seem much more important to me – these are inserts, short shots which are film versions of *Sleeping Staś* (*Śpiący Staś*) and *Motherhood* (*Macierzyństwo*), which give the viewer a moment of peace and quiet; see: Taras 2007a: 138-139.

the story about making of *The Wedding* using a digital camera, it turned out that this was only a legend, because the film was made on... 35 mm film, using a traditional film camera. Unfortunately, I am unable to pinpoint the exact reason for creating this 'digital legend'.

The Wedding takes place in one of the villages in the Podkarpacie region. The film covers the wedding ceremony of Kasia (Tamara Arciuch) and Janusz (Bartek Topa) and the following celebration, from the afternoon to the dawn of the following day. For the sake of clarity, I will explain that throughout the entire film, the viewers are dealing with two cameras: one which was used to make the film and the other one, operated by one of the characters shown on screen – the Cameraman (Maciej Stuhr), hired by Wojnar (Marian Dziędziel) to record the wedding of his daughter, but above all to make people see that the richest farmer can afford such a service. The fact that the Cameraman uses a small DV camera provokes outrage by Wojnar's wife (Iwona Bielska) – 'Didn't they have a smaller one? It's so small that people might not notice it!' The clips shot by the Cameraman appear in the film from the very beginning, as inserts interrupting the wedding sequence, thanks to which, first of all, they inform the viewers that they will deal with a film within the film, featuring both shots made by the team led by Andrzej Szulkowski, as well as those made by one of the characters – the Cameraman), and they simultaneously instill a sense of anxiety in the viewer, thanks to their dynamism. The shots made by the protagonist are, of course, more chaotic, rough, on the verge of 'visual dirt'. However, the longer we watch *The Wedding*, the more we find out that somehow the film and the 'film in film' do not diverge visually from each other too much and that the materials recorded by the Cameraman¹⁵ perfectly complement the 'official' recording. Perhaps it was this 'lucidity' that led to the creation of the legend of digital origins of *The Wedding*? The motion picture made with the most noble and respected tool among the cinematographers – a film camera, using the noblest of all materials – 35 mm film, really resembles amateur videos (!) shot at weddings. It is worth noting at this point that the cinematographer, Andrzej Szulkowski, went beyond the principles of cinematography, which

¹⁵ Fragments recorded by the Cameraman were shot with a DV digital camera.

requires both great awareness of the technique (a sense of which principles can be ignored and which must be respected) and humility.

The Cameraman recorded the 'second life' of the wedding, a subcutaneous existence present outside the narrative of greetings and best wishes. We can see chaotic images and at the same time we can hear recorded statements about bad food, diluted vodka, motives of Janusz, who married Kasia too quickly, because 'he probably got her pregnant', as well as Wojnar's stinginess and wealth. We observe wedding games, which make the bride embarrassed. Several times throughout the film we can see her face, which absolutely does not resemble the face of a woman happy to get married, having fun at her own wedding. Kasia smiles when a bride rather should not, for example when the clumsy best man drops the wedding rings. At some point, the girl takes over the camera and films how the local thugs beat the Cameraman after she convinced them to do so. It turns out that he is the father of her child, that he cheated on her and left her, which is why Wojnar gave his daughter a choice to either get an abortion or marry Janusz, who was once in love with her, but who was never noticed by the girl. What is more, he agreed to do it not out of love, but for an Audi TT car. The cameraman wanted to see if Kasia was happy, which is why he asked for a favor from the owner of the wedding film company. This explains the chaotic shots from the beginning of the film – the protagonist learned how to use a DV camera. The materials recorded by the Cameraman turn out to be a book of proverbs, life truths and confessions of the community, ruled by Wojnar due to his financial status. These confessions are often moving, as in the case of a mother showing photos of her son, a 'good boy' who only drinks too often and then he beats... The rest of the confession is left to our imagination. The Cameraman managed to record events that reveal the truth about the motives of the protagonists' behavior. The amateur recordings expose the hypocrisy of guests who have come to the wedding, but do not wish the young well at all, and have come to see what will go wrong, as well as out of fear of offending Wojnar. It is from a clip recorded almost by accident in the toilet, where the beaten Cameraman was trying to collect himself after the assault, that Kasia learns about the transaction she became an object of, and about the death of her grandfather, who could not deal with the truth about how his son-in-law treated his granddaughter – in order to save money, Wojnar imported a car for Janusz from abroad,

and one of the parts of the car payment was to be a part of the grandfather's land, where a planned motorway would be built in the future, which was something that the protagonist did not know about. The man did not agree to give away the rights to his land, he did not want to give in to the demands of his son-in-law, finally, devastated by his granddaughter's situation, he died of a heart attack. The camera in the hands of the protagonist of *The Wedding* records the transgressions of the community, witnessing Wojnar's efforts¹⁶ to make everything right, that is, in accordance with the rules respected by his community. Apart from that, it is also an intimate diary of a man who still loves Kasia, as evidenced by the long close-ups of her face, which slightly resembles the situation from *Double Portrait* (and *It will Be Somehow*) and at the same time confirms that a digital camera, such as the one installed in a mobile phone, serves as a place to store the most intimate and important memories of our lives, it plays the role of a talisman (this will be convincingly shown by Piotr Szczepański in *The Valley of Shitheads* [*Aleja Gówniarzy*, 2006], in the sequence of showing off children's antics recorded with their parents' phones in front of the childless Marcin [Marcin Brzozowski]). It seems particularly important to me that even one of the direct references to Wyspiański's work – whose influence on Smarzowski's aesthetically unstable film cannot be unnoticed and underestimated – a shot inspired by the *Maternity* (*Macierzyństwo*) pastel artwork, featuring a dark-haired woman breast-feeding a child, while being watched by girls with big bows in their hair, was made by the Cameraman, which only confirms the protagonist's distance, his ability to observe and focus on things that seem to be missed by others. Only the Cameraman notices the breastfeeding mother, while other guests are so drunk that they are unable to control their reflexes or even notice what is going on around them. It is probably worth asking, where did the woman come from, and what is she doing in the company of people from whom she clearly stands out with her beauty and clothing? After all, her presence does not add anything new to the plot, although, of course, her character serves as a direct reference to Wyspiański, announces the 'wedding dance' which in this space will turn

¹⁶ In spite of all the man's villainy, I can't see him as unambiguously negative, because Wojnar is simply a product of the community he is a part of. Only the grandfather and Kasia oppose the hypocrisy and the cult of money.

into singing *Rota* by the drunk guests¹⁷. Perhaps the dark-haired woman and the children accompanying her are phantoms, which would also be a reference to Wyspiański's *The Wedding (Wesele)*, which is chock-full of phantoms that appear only to some of the protagonists? Perhaps only the Cameraman sees a woman and children, or maybe they are only seen and recorded by the camera, which lives its own life in Smarzowski's films, sometimes recording what it wants, rather than what would have escaped the attention of someone using it anyway.

This happened in *The Dark House*, where the camera, used as a tool for documenting the crime scene investigation, will record a drunk prosecutor (Robert Więckiewicz) falling into a ditch, a re-enactment of the game that preceded the murder, an agreement between police officers and the prosecutor on how to get rid of Lieutenant Mróz... Such things could not be filmed by the officer operating the camera. One can probably say that in Smarzowski's films we are dealing with an 'intelligent camera' – although another term, namely 'fair camera' seems far more appropriate, since the camera records the moments of truth, reveals the true intentions and motivations of the characters.

The Dark House features a Krasnogorsk camera, recording on 16 mm film, which is more than just a prop, because it was also used to record the sequence of a crime scene investigation carried out in February 1982 in what remained after the fire on Dziabas' family farm (Kinga Preis and Marian Dziędziel), constituting a significant and crucial part of the film (the rest was shot using a Sony ex 1 digital camera).

¹⁷ This is the first of the very strong and meaningful scenes in Smarzowski's films, which can be regarded as his signature. Such sequences knock the audience out of – as Maria Janion described it – 'falling in love with one's own beauty' (Janion 1996: 15). In *The Dark House*, such scenes included throwing out Lieutenant Mróz out of a village shop by people waiting in a line, wanting to buy vodka and cigarettes, chanting 'Solidarity, Solidarity!' and showing the 'Victory' gesture, as well as the pregnant policewoman standing in line for a shot of vodka for every participant of the investigation. In *The Rose*, it is the penultimate sequence showing that Róża Kwiatkowska's farm was taken over by displaced persons from the Borderlands, whom the woman had warmly welcomed. *Traffic Department*, the most intense, almost festering visually, consists almost only of such scenes.

The example of *The Dark House* shows that in the world of Smarzowski it is not important who holds the camera. On the basis of *The Wedding* one could conclude that the camera is in the hands of someone who wants to understand the situation, someone who wants to know the truth (the Cameraman wants to know the reasons for Kasia's marriage, and also check if the girl will have a chance to be happy in life), and someone who is not a member of the community, keeping distance from events and characters (with the exception of Kasia), who will thus be able to judge everything. In *The Dark House*, at first we are deceived that Jasiak (Grzegorz Wojdon), a policeman who records the investigation, is a positive figure. It turns out, however, that this is not the case, because it is him who provokes Środoń (Arkadiusz Jakubik) to flee by telling him 'They are trying to frame you, get the fuck out of here!' and then films the man who stopped, shocked by the sight of the body of the murdered lieutenant Mróz (Bartłomiej Topa), and picked up the knife used to kill the man.

In Smarzowski's world, the camera (the one seen on the screen) is much more important than the person who operates it. It witnesses the events, as if it was more aware than the cinematographer and knew better what to record. It is independent and impartial, as proved by *The Dark House*. After all, the purpose of the investigation is not finding out the truth or re-enacting the situation that led to the double murder and suicide on Dziabas' farm, but to frame Środoń for the murder of Dziabas, his wife and son, and then additionally for murdering Mróz, who, while working on the case of the unlucky animal technician, accidentally approached the mysterious embezzlement in a state-owned farm, which worried the authorities to such an extent that he was met by a high-ranking secret police officer on his way to Arłamów, who offered him a promotion for stopping his private investigation. (In just a few hours, Mróz discovered more than others did in several months, simply because he wanted to know the truth about the crimes and one unlucky road bend, where many witnesses of the thefts died in an accident). For the sake of clarity, I will add that Środoń came to Dziabas' farm in autumn of 1981, because after his wife's death he wanted to start a new life in some distant place. He was offered a job in a state farm in the Bieszczady mountains, and due to the fact that the bus he was travelling on broke down, he decided to go on foot so as not to waste his time. Having decided to take a shortcut through Dziabas' field, he was bitten

by their dog, and as a compensation, the hosts offered him a refreshment, with copious amounts of alcohol. The moonshine encouraged the characters and allowed them to get so close that Dziabas and Środoń started to plan a joint venture – the production of alcohol on an almost industrial scale. Środoń showed them his savings, which he had got from his wife's insurance policy, which is when they decided to kill him. The guest was supposed to sleep in the room of Dziabas' son, Janusz. The man went out for a while, which is when the 'rightful' tenant returned to the room and promptly died at the hands of his own father, convinced that he was killing the guest¹⁸. Dziabas, devastated by the fact that he killed his son, also killed his wife, and then hanged himself. Środoń has been accused of committing the crimes. In *The Dark House*, the shots which attract the most attention and capture the viewer the most, are close-ups showing Środoń terrified by the fact that it is held responsible for deeds that he did not commit. The fact that the murder is something abstract to him, that it does not fit within his values is evidenced by his protests not to film him with an axe, which the police try to give him forcefully. One of the many paradoxes or ambiguities of this film, which only testify to its value, is that the camera, a tool that was supposed to forge a lie, to accuse an innocent man, captures elements of truth, clearly contrary to the statement that repeats throughout the whole film: 'Truth? There is no such thing.'

I wonder if this intelligent, free, fair camera, 'cast' in Smarzowski's films, cannot be linked with the last shot, characteristic of his films, in which we can see the set from above, the space where the events presented to us transpired and the characters whose dramas we have managed to get to know? Is it not possible to associate it with the gaze of the One who rules over this world but does not interfere with it? Someone, whose presence the author misses. Maybe this Somebody also operates a camera and that's why the camera becomes fair, seeing and knowing?

In *Traffic Department*, the recording devices are for sure operated by people. The protagonists use iPhones, treated as intimate diaries, to record moments of joy, such as a company event, pranks pulled on Hawryluk

¹⁸ All associations with Karol Rostworowski's *Surprise (Niespodzianka)* are very much in place, as this drama was inspired by the authors of the script – Wojciech Smarzowski and Łukasz Kośmicki.

and football successes of Król's son. In turn, a road police officer, Lisowski (Marcin Dorociński), registers people's misdemeanors with his mobile phones, which he then uses to blackmail them. Hawryluk (Robert Wabich) filming sergeant Król (Bartek Topa) on his way to a brothel, and then in the venue itself, to charge him with Lisowski's murder does the same thing. One of the ways to read *Traffic Department* may be recognizing it as a film about the power of images¹⁹, but even more about the fact that it all depends on whose hands the recording will end up in and what context it will be given. The clips that had enabled Lisowski to blackmail others were used by Król as a foundation of his alibi. He also disseminated clips from the orgy with politicians and businessmen, although he was promised a bribe for stopping his private investigation (another one in the world created by

¹⁹ The fact that *Traffic Department* can be interpreted as a film about the power of the image can be proved by the sheer number of camera types used by the crew during the production of the film – all in order to ensure the authenticity of the film. As the cinematographer, Piotr Sobociński jr, explains: 'Our basic assumption was that we wanted to get closer to realism, but not necessarily by going with naturalism. We perceive the world differently when we are under the influence of strong emotions. We wanted to show it on the screen. We gave up the naturalistic, objective look at the scenes for scenes filtered by the emotions that accompanied them. (...) We used many media, because this is what was written in the script, and what brings us closer to the truth. The main camera we used was Red Epic. We didn't want to film everything using the Epic and then degrade selected scenes. We wanted to maintain the depth of field and all the characteristic features of each format. We used iPhones, CCTV cameras, GoPro cameras, pens with hidden camera, police material recorded on an analogue Hi8 camera, as well as dashcams. All these devices filmed and also appeared in the film as props. We had scenes taking place on the bus, during which we used two Epic cameras, all while half of the actors had telephones and filmed each other. We used as many as fifteen cameras for one scene! I sympathise with the editor, who then had to review it all. An interesting fact is that the iPhone turned out to be too good and the image had to be degraded. The difference was not as big as we expected. We need to find the right texture for these clips, because we wanted to preserve the authenticity and multiplicity of formats. (...) The concept is that the boundary between the objective world, that is to say the Epic, and the subjective world, meaning other cameras, starts to blur at some point' (Wernio 2012: 62-63).

Smarzowski). The hero did not succumb to blackmail, he himself did not want to blackmail anyone – just like the murder did not fit into Środoń's mentality and abandoning the pursuit of the truth was not in the nature of Lieutenant Mróz, Król could not stand blackmail – and that is why he informed the society about how its representatives behave. As a result, just like Mróz, he was murdered (incidentally, both roles were played by the same actor).

However, some progress was made in the world created by Smarzowski, because this time the guilty were punished, or at least in the last shot (mostly in the general plan with the camera pointing downwards, of course) there was hope that this will happen – Król's superior was arrested at the funeral of his subordinate by the officers of the department of internal affairs. Maybe this progress stemmed from the fact that this time Smarzowski showed Poland after the turn of 1989, and the plot of *The Dark House* took place just before the imposition of martial law and during its duration? If so, despite the fact that the image of Poland, which we are dealing with in *Traffic Department*, may be frightening (we see a society destroyed by corruption, with norms subverted both in private and public space), it is clear that now there is a chance for justice and punishment of the guilty, which was not mentioned in the world (and in times) of *The Dark House*.

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Summary

In this paper, I reflect on the role and function of the camera 'acting' (that is, the camera placed in the hands of the protagonists of films by Wojciech Smarzowski) that appears on the screen as often as an axe, which as an item is strongly associated with this director's cinematography. I also refute the 'digital' legends of his debut – *The Wedding*, which has not been recorded using a digital camera, but an analogue one. A camera 'cast' in Smarzowski's film should not be considered an extra, but a full-fledged protagonist, a witness seeing (and therefore recording) more than can be seen by the characters holding it in their hands. This perfectly corresponds with the last shot – perhaps the most characteristic one for the author of the films discussed – the shot in which the One who reigns over the world, but does not interfere with it (since we have free will) gazes at the universe created by Wojciech Smarzowski.

Keywords: Wojciech Smarzowski, digital camera, cinematography, final shot, Poland after '89, film image, light in film