

## Duality as a creative principle in the films of A. Zulawski

by Miliana Lenak

Cinema and Digital Media, directing specialization - film essay

Opponent report by MFA. Giovanni Robbiano.

I have been always fascinated and captured by the controversial, imaginative and often shocking cinema of the late Andrzej Zulawski (Lvov, 1940 – Paris 2016) whose films, especially in the late seventies and eighties have been influential and popular.

Miliana Lenak analyzes the production of Zulawski focusing on two of the most famous ones: *"Third part of the night"* (1971) debut feature shot in Poland and *"Possession"* (1981) shot in West Germany and starring Sam Neill and Isabelle Adjani in a role that gave her Palme for female acting at Cannes 1982.

The dualism she refers to is the fundamental binary theme and relationship between love and death (Eros/Thanatos) considered to be the founding elements of these two films and also present in the other productions of the Polish Film maker.

Miliana's essay is well centered and documented, she proves to know well the subject and she is able to support her thesis with original contribution and clever analysis of the film material, the biography and the personality of Z. .

Many elements of the directors life such as his passionate relationships with his actresses (he was both married to *"Third part of the night"*'s main female star Malgorzata Braunek and then living for many years with French star Sophie Marceau) have been examined and commented.

Miliana is capable to insert in her essay this part of the biography in the artistic outcome and in the directorial essence of Zulawski's work and life, in this case biography and creativity mingled and contributed one to each other in a very particular human and artistic itinerary.

It is evident that the symbol of love (and sex) and its ambivalent an unavoidable connection with death it has been the spine of Zulawski's film research, both films show scenes of sexual intercourses symbolized by the feeling of pain or the sense of annihilation and destruction of the character(s) both film show also a double, dual character or antagonist, and a mysterious monster, that becomes catalyst, object of desire, instrument of physical change and ultimately death. Zulawski is nevertheless a very difficult author to handle, his vision is blatant, extreme, exuberant, his symbols are as obscure as sometimes gross, the meanings and the narrative connections are often loose if not openly contradictory.

Interesting but hard material to explore, without the presumption of going too far in her reading, Miliana offers a good introduction to the elements and themes in Zulawski's work and cinema. She is precise and punctual in mentioning the original traumas of childhood, and the tragic fate of his parents including his young sister, during the second world war.

These facts of life vastly quoted in *"The third part of the night"* and more metaphorically in *"Possession"* have been crucial features in the development of a film personality that has been excessive and not at all balanced, but has given us some bizarre and fascinating films. Zulawski has endured a cult status that his recent death, despite a final film (cosmos) that will not leave great memory, this thesis could be a blueprint for a larger more detailed and deeper study of his work now that the perspective on it and the human adventure of Zulawski have come to an end.

I do recommend this work to be admitted for defence before a FAMU state exam examination panel.

Opponent review written by MFA Giovanni Robbiano head of FAMU international  
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