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## Paradoxes of Time Travel in Juliusz Machulski's Cinema

### ABSTRACT

The subject of time travel has been scarcely explored in Polish cinema. *How Much Does The Trojan Horse Weigh?* (2008) and *EmbaSSy* (2013) directed by Juliusz Machulski, a shrewd observer and ruthless critic of the Polish social situation over the past four decades, are rare examples. Best known for his 1980s comedies exposing the absurdities of the communist regime, Machulski takes us on a journey back in time in his two post-millennial time travel films. *How Much Does The Trojan Horse Weigh?* shifts us back to 1987 and revisits the reality of communism in Poland, whilst *EmbaSSy* transports us to 1939, where World War II is about to begin. The aim of this paper is to examine Juliusz Machulski's vision of time travel, its paradoxes and consequences, as well as the nature of diegetic realities within his time travel films.

**KEYWORDS:** time travel, paradox, time machine, cinema, science fiction, fantasy

### STRESZCZENIE

Paradoksy podróży w czasie w kinie Juliusza Machulskiego

Tematyka podróży w czasie nie cieszy się zbyt dużą popularnością w kinie polskim. Filmy *Ile waży koń trojański?* (2008) i *AmbaSSada* (2013) w reżyserii Juliusza Machulskiego, wnikliwego obserwatora i ostrego krytyka polskiej rzeczywistości społeczno-politycznej, są rzadkimi wyjątkami. Znany z kina komediowego lat 80., obnażającego absurdy reżimu komunistycznego w Polsce, Machulski zabiera widzów w podróż w czasie w dwóch postmilenijnych produkcjach z pogranicza *fantasy* i *science fiction*. *Ile waży koń trojański?* przenosi widzów w czasy późnego PRL-u, a *AmbaSSada* – do roku 1939 w przeddzień wybuchu II wojny światowej. Celem tego artykułu jest analiza zjawiska podróży w czasie, jego paradoksów i konsekwencji, jak również natury diegetycznej rzeczywistości ukazanej w filmach Juliusza Machulskiego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZE:** podróż w czasie, paradoks, wehikuł czasu, kino, *science fiction*, *fantasy*

## Time Travel Cinema Taxonomy

The notion of time travel has inspired writers and filmmakers for a long time and has repeatedly returned in numerous novels, as well as cinematic and TV productions. Samuel Madden's 1733 epistolary novel *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century* is considered one of the earliest examples of speculative time travel fiction. However, it is the 19th century which is predominantly associated with the rise of the time travel sub-genre, such as H.G. Wells's seminal works of science fiction: *The Chronic Argonauts* (1888) and his timeless classic *The Time Machine* (1895). In both books, Wells attempts to provide a scientific, physical and mathematical explanation for the time travelling process (Sherman, 2017, p. 2). The matter was different in the case of another famous 19th century novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) by Mark Twain, which constitutes a fantasy time travel piece. Here, the science behind time traveling is of no importance to the plot. Interestingly, it is Twain's novel that became the first notable time travel adaptation to be brought to the silver screen shortly after the invention of the cinematic medium. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was first filmed in 1921 and, subsequently, in 1931 and 1949. *The Time Machine* made its way to the big screen in 1960 and again in 2002, with the earlier version winning an Academy Award for best visual effects. The 20th century brought an increase of interest in the subject of time travel, both in the fields of literature and cinema. Out of the many screen representations, the status of the most renowned and beloved icon of popular culture belongs, perhaps, to Robert Zemeckis's trilogy: *Back to the Future* (1985), *Back to the Future II* (1989) and *Back to the Future III* (1990), with some reviewers lauding it as "the most perfect blockbuster ever made" (St. James, 2016). In 2011, Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* earned an Oscar nomination in the Best Picture category as the first of the time travel sub-genre to do so (Meslow, 2012).

Over the years, the sub-genre has also attracted the attention of academic scholars representing various fields of studies; from film and literature studies to physics and science. Among the numerous aspects of research and analyses, the issue of the categorisation of time travel narratives emerged. In a 2021 article, Dan Frey, author and screenwriter, proposed an interesting taxonomy of time travel films, distinguishing four types of movies featuring the following aspects: 1. seeing the future, 2. travelling to the future, 3. travelling to the past, and 4. time loops (Frey, 2021). The first category involves seeing the future in the form of a prophecy or prediction verbalised in letters, newspapers, internet and other means of communication. As Dan Frey points out, "it is actually information which travels through time" (2021). Frey splits this category into two further

sub-types: “stories of inevitable foresights,” in which the outcome had already been decided and nothing can alter or prevent it (e.g., Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*), and “stories of preventable foresights” in which the future, once seen, can be influenced and eventually changed (e.g., Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*). Following this line of thinking, even though Frey did not explore the other end of this category’s timeline, it seems logical to assume that information (in the form of newspapers, photographs, books, films, etc.), constitutes the simplest of time machines, offering an easily accessible journey into the past to which one and all are invited.

Frey’s second category is “travelling to the future,” in which he cites H.G. Wells’ famous example of *The Time Machine* along with its various adaptations. However, according to Frey: “The future feels so unknowable, it often ends up being less interesting than we’d expect” (2021).

The case is different with category number three, “travelling to the past;” probably the most often explored in science fiction and fantasy genres. This type of time travel consists of two sub-categories, the first of which is “changing history,” which encapsulates the idea of travelling into the past with a view to altering it and, ultimately, succeeding in doing so (e.g., Stephen King’s *11/22/63*). Interestingly, as Frey notices, “in the massive time travel canon, it’s almost exclusively villains who try to rewrite the past” (2021). Cinema, however, seems to treat the subject in a lighter vein than the scientific fraternity might, often putting aside the question of morality and ethics, or indeed the consequences of such ventures. Throughout the history of the medium, audiences have been offered numerous examples of time travel productions constituting not so much a threat or warning against the dangers of time travel, but rather a source for hours of joyous entertainment (e.g., *The Adam Project* [2022]).

The second sub-category, “travelling to the past” assumes “immutable timelines.” In short, this type of time travel teaches us that, no matter what we do, we are incapable of changing history. The category accepts the possibility of time travel as such, however a time traveller remains an observer, even though they are often allowed to interact with surrounding people of that time (e.g., *Midnight in Paris* [2011]). The butterfly effect has no application to this category, and thus a predestination theory springs to mind, leading us to speculate on the philosophical issue of free will and the individual.

Finally, Frey’s fourth category involves “time loops.” In this type of narratives, a character is trapped in time reliving the same day (or other time period) over and over again, eventually coming to terms with the personal revelation that “if we want to change our lived reality, we need to start with ourselves” (e.g., *Groundhog Day* [1993]) (Frey, 2021). Thus, time loops provide us with an opportunity to learn a lesson about ourselves and to make personal changes before attempting to change the world around us.

Paradoxes of time travel are another popular aspect frequently developed in cinema. It is vital to note, however, that popular culture interpretations of the notion of time travel paradoxes conspicuously vary with the purely scientific understanding of theories behind them. The subject of paradoxes first materialised in the context of physical analyses and definitions of spacetime on base of classical mechanics, Albert Einstein's special and general theory of relativity, as well as quantum mechanics (Al-Khalili, 2003, p. 111–174). Over time, the above-mentioned and numerous other complex science-derived theories and ideas got mixed with each other and simplified in various texts of popular culture, eventually resulting in colloquialisation of the subject and frequent intertwining of terms and ideas from random fields of physics. Thus, for instance, in literature and film, the grandfather paradox is often closely linked to the butterfly effect, even though the former constitutes one of the spacetime-related paradoxes, whereas the latter stems from chaos theory and relates rather to a question of determinism/indeterminism. Nevertheless, scientific discrepancies aside, this article will focus on a much looser pop-cultural understanding and cinematic realisation of the subject of time travel paradoxes.

Whilst Hollywood may boast of a long list of time travel movies discussing the topic and other issues arriving from this particular theme, when looking back at the history of Polish cinema one quickly discovers that the science fiction genre is altogether far from popular among Polish filmmakers. Even so, the subject of time travel appeared in several productions (like *Hour Of A Crimson Rose* [1963], or *The Hourglass Sanatorium* [1973]) linking the Polish movie scene with the Western tradition of literary and cinematic time travel sci-fi and fantasy genre. The post-millennial cinema brought us two particularly interesting time travel productions, *How Much Does The Trajan Horse Weigh?* (2008) and *EmbaSSy* (2013), each directed by one of Poland's most acclaimed directors, Juliusz Machulski. Both films will be the focal point of the subsequent parts of this article.

### Juliusz Machulski And His Time Travel Cinema

Born in 1955, Juliusz Machulski was recognised as a “miraculous child” of Polish cinema right after his directorial debut *Vabank* in 1981, made at the age of twenty-six. The comedy heist film set in the 1930s initiated Machulski's long list of comedies to follow. A shrewd observer and ruthless critic of the Polish social situation over the last four decades, to quote the words of a critic, Maciej Pawlicki,

Machulski jumped into our cinema without a ticket, asking no one's opinion. He fell on the monotonous film landscape like a bomb, right between dignified masters and inspired buffoons. ... He shook the hierarchy, shuffled the criteria, seduced the audience. He gave our cinema some fresh air, from the basement to the attic. ... Machulski rehabilitates comedy and ennobles popular cinema. ... He laughs at us, at himself, and lets others laugh as well (Pawlicki, in: Olczak-Moraczewska, 2009).

Indeed, it was his ability to perceive the gloomy reality of the communist Poland through the prism of comedic absurdity that first attracted the attention of audiences and critics, bringing recognition to the director as one of the most interesting Polish film artists of the era. After several 1980s blockbusters, including the science fiction dystopian comedy *Sexmission* (1983) which affirmed Machulski's position in the movie business in Poland and abroad (especially in the Eastern European countries), the 1990s brought a new wave of popularity with his post-communist films. These included *Kiler*, a light-hearted comedy of errors touching on the subject of the Polish crime underworld. Machulski's post-millennial film catalogue presents his widest variety of subject matter to date. The 2002 *Superproduction* provides an auto-thematic criticism of the Polish film industry, the 2004 *Vinci* revisits the criminal comedy genre, while *The Lullaby* (2010) is a vampire film (see: Majer, 2014). Specifically, and as stated before, *How Much Does The Trojan Horse Weigh?* (2008) and *EmbaSSy* (2013) explore the subject of time travel, its paradoxes and consequences.

### Time Travel Case Study 1: *How Much Does the Trojan Horse Weigh?*

#### The Plot

The movie presents the story of Zosia (Ilona Ostrowska), happy mother of teenage Florka (Sylvia Dziorek) and wife to her second husband Kuba (Maciej Marczewski), who on a New Year's Eve of 1999 unwillingly celebrates her fortieth birthday. On the night, Zosia expresses her regret about not meeting Kuba earlier and wasting many years with her former husband. Answering her desire, and instead of the feared global computer crash brought about by the Millennium bug, a momentary power cut following a thunderstorm shifts Zosia back to 1987 where, to her horror, she wakes up next to her first husband Darek (Robert Więckiewicz). Apparently trapped again for good in communist Poland with its ailing economy and galore of absurd flaws, Zosia resolves to change her life for better as

soon as possible. Thus, she sets her mind on speeding up her divorce and quickly seeking her second husband to be. While the plot presents us with a flow of comic twists and turns, what becomes obvious is an overpowering sense of nostalgia toward the past. The 1980s, the heroine's previous past, now becomes her present, heading towards a looming 1990s and Zosia's current future. Paradoxically, in her new 1987 reality, her previous future also becomes her past.

## The Paradoxes

### *Battling Butterfly Effect*

The idea of the "butterfly effect" (in physics also connected to the theory of deterministic chaos) was first proposed by American mathematician and meteorologist, Edward Norton Lorenz, in relation to the weather: "In China a butterfly flaps its wings, leading to unpredictable changes in the U.S. weather a few days later" (Rafferty). On the metaphorical level, the theory assumes that a seemingly insignificant action performed in one part of the globe can become the cause of tremendous events and changes in another. Over the years, Lorenz' theory permeated into popular culture, becoming a recurring motif in numerous cinematic productions.

In *How Much Does the Trojan Horse Weigh?*, despite having knowledge of the future, which Zosia shares with her grandmother (Danuta Szaflarska) and some of her friends and strangers throughout her stay in 1987, the historical future remains unchanged. On various occasions, Zosia reveals future events, including the fall of the communist regime, joining NATO, and bringing IKEA to Poland. However, neither her time travel, nor her knowledge of the future influence the historical time dimension. The butterfly effect is ineffective on a national and global scale. The time traveller plays a role of a mere observer as far as the historical timeline is concerned.

### *Battling Predestination*

The concept of predestination reaches back to religious doctrines, stating that the future of each man has been ordained by God and fate, and nothing can change it (Petruzzello). In physics, a similar idea can be noticed in the causal loop theory proposing (in connection to time travel) that an event can be the cause of another event, which in turn was the cause of the first mentioned event (Wasserman, 2018, p. 146). Thus, the origin of the initial event can never be traced, which further results in a conclusion that past cannot be changed. Although both concepts refer approximately to the same idea, the

term predestination is perhaps more frequently used to address the phenomenon in a colloquial sense, also in pop culture. In Machulski's film, even though the protagonist does not seem able to influence historical events, she *is* capable of influencing her own personal micro-universe. She succeeds in splitting up with her first husband earlier than before, and in getting to meet her second husband sooner. She manages to save her beloved grandmother from death in a fatal coach accident, thus erasing the tragic event from her past. Finally, she speeds up business relations with one of her friends and saves another one from entering a relationship with her future wife-beating husband. Therefore, Machulski's time traveller battles the assumption of predestination paradox (or a causal loop theory) thoroughly on a personal level. The question of why it should be possible to change the events in her personal life but not the wider history is left without an answer.

## Conflicting and Unexplained Issues

### *Self-visitation mystery*

What happens to the 1987 Zosia when the new millennium Zosia arrives in the past remains a mystery. Zosia replaces her younger self and overtakes her 1987 life alongside her first husband Darek. She does not seem to have aged, and nobody seems to notice any change in her or her behaviour, despite the occasional time-travel-related blunders, a thoroughly new attitude towards life, and a determination to do things her own way. Nevertheless, once again, Machulski leaves this matter unexplored and unexplained, as if in the hope that viewers will not notice or question it.

### *Parallel universe or a dream sequence?*

Zosia unexpectedly returns to her own previous time after being struck on the face by Kuba's first wife (Maja Ostaszewska). Upon regaining consciousness, she finds herself in hospital with Kuba by her side. Zosia discovers that she is pregnant. This leads to some further confusion, since she believes she is pregnant with Florka, her daughter from her marriage to her first husband, Darek. She soon learns that the teenage Florka is in fact at home awaiting her arrival from hospital, together with the grandmother whose life Zosia had saved by averting the coach accident. Nevertheless, perplexingly, despite her visit to 1987, Zosia was never missing from the present timeline either. This can be explained by means of two possible scenarios. Scenario 1: Machulski's diegesis constitutes a multiverse with at least two alternate universes and timelines. The question

remains of what happens to the “Zosias” from each parallel universe when their other-universe alter egos arrive, or indeed how they manage to avoid self-visitations. Scenario 2: the plot presented in the movie can be viewed as a dream sequence, where the rules of logic are easy to bend and explanations of paradoxical or conflicting events are not necessarily required.

## Time Travel Case Study 2: *EmbaSSy*

### The Plot

It is 2012 and a young married couple, Mela (Magdalena Gąziowska) and Przemek (Bartosz Porczyk), are house-sitting a Warsaw fourth floor apartment owned by their uncle Oskar (Jan Englert). They learn that the building was once the site of the German embassy, back in the inter-war period. Strange noises emanating from an old-fashioned typewriter can be heard after midnight and, as Mela is to later discover, the elevator is in fact a time machine which, when stopped at the third floor, transports the characters to 1939 where World War II is about to begin. The heroine is suspected of being a spy and questioned by none other than Joachim von Ribbentrop (Adam Darski) himself. The embassy’s officers are awaiting a visit from Adolf Hitler (Robert Więckiewicz), who eventually gets captured by Mela, Przemek and his look-alike grandfather Anton (Bartosz Porczyk) – a secret agent of the Polish intelligence whom they meet during their time travel escapades. Hitler is kept captive in the upstairs 2012 apartment. In the course of the movie, another time travel portal is discovered in the form of two old-fashioned wardrobes placed on the third and fourth floor respectively, thus providing an alternative passage between 2012 and 1939. The events unfold in a comedic way, ultimately leading to a change of the past, effectively erasing Adolf Hitler, and consequently World War II, from the annals of history. The final scene offers an idyllic picture of the characters enjoying a walk through the streets of contemporary Warsaw, untouched by the atrocities of the war.

### The Paradoxes

#### *Battling Predestination*

In his book, James Gleick recalls Larry Dwyer’s claim that “whatever else time travel may entail, it does not involve changing the past” (2017,



p. 229). The events presented in *EmbaSSy* prove Dwyer's theory wrong by means of a bold scenario opposing the concept of both personal and historical predestination, in which the past gets fully altered.

*Global level:* The 2012 characters know that the German embassy was bombed in 1939. Because of the elevator time travel portal, they meet Adolf Hitler and attempt to change the course of history by leading him onto the roof of the building on the day of the bombing. As a result of this manoeuvre, Hitler dies, bombed by the German squadron. However, Hitler's doppelgänger, Lepke, is being kept in secret and trained by the third Reich in order to step into Hitler's place in case of an emergency. Nevertheless, the bombing causes significant commotion in the building, and in 2012 uncle Oskar's cat, Winston, falls into the wardrobe portal, arrives in 1939, and runs across the embassy stairs where Lepke (in the disguise of Hitler) is marching out to proclaim the beginning of World War II. He stumbles over the cat, falls from the stairs, and dies. Failing to produce yet another Hitler's doppelgänger, Germany resigns from their war actions and the whole event is remembered in history as the September Incident. World War II simply never happened.

*Personal level:* As a result of the embassy bombing, the time travel portals get destroyed. Due to the chaos generated by the bombing, Przemek is left behind in 1939 whilst trying to help a female German clerk, Ingeborg (Aleksandra Domańska). As the plot unfolds, and though initially in love with Anton (Przemek's lookalike grandfather), Ingeborg shifts her affections to Przemek. Anton stays in 2012 with Mela, and in the final sequence of the film, Mela and Anton learn from Przemek's and Ingeborg's granddaughter that the couple got married back in 1939. On one of the Jewish book stalls, Mela finds an old copy of the book Przemek had always wanted to write, telling the story of Hitler and his doppelgänger Lepke.

Thus, in *EmbaSSy*, history gets altered on both global and historical levels, as well as on the characters' personal level.

### *The Grandfather Paradox*

To quote Ryan Wasserman, the grandfather paradox is “the most famous paradox of time travel” and the one that is the most often discussed in philosophical literature (2018, p. 19). Furthermore, it is also the one most frequently explored in cinema. The paradox, alternatively called by Wasserman “the retrosuicide paradox” (2018, p. 19), is based on the assumption that a time traveller travels back in time in order to kill his/her grandfather before he has his children. However, the success of the mission automatically entails the act of the time traveller's self-destruction. The act of killing the grandfather erases the time traveller from history.

Even though Przemek's grandfather Anton in *EmbaSSy* is not actually killed, he gets shifted to 2012. The fact that his time travelling happens before he has a chance to have his own family – i.e., his son (to become Przemek's own father) and grandson (Przemek's future self) – implies that Przemek's father, and ultimately Przemek, were never born. The paradox is that Przemek could not have travelled back in time to 1939, as he had never existed in the first place. Nevertheless, this puzzling issue remains ignored in the film.

### *Hitler's Murder Paradox (a variant of the grandfather paradox)*

The paradox is built upon the following hypothesis: you travel back in time to murder Hitler before World War II begins. However, if you succeed in killing Hitler, the reason for your travel is erased. Thus, you have no reason to travel in time in the first place. Conclusion: the paradox is proof sufficient that time travel is impossible (Koberlein, 2015).

In *EmbaSSy*, Machulski presents a different scenario. His characters get shifted in time by coincidence, and only when faced with Adolf Hitler do they decide to kill him – on a whim. The lack of initial intention to kill Hitler allows them to do it and change history in the process.

### *The Butterfly Effect*

The characters in *EmbaSSy* time travel and succeed in changing the past. By doing so, they influence the future. It is thanks to the time travelling cat, Winston, that the ultimate change is guaranteed, since he played a decisive role in the story when he inadvertently provoked Lepke's death. One seemingly insignificant action initiated a chain of events that dramatically altered the future.

### *Parallel Universe*

At the end of the film, the characters are found walking through the 2012 version of Warsaw Old Town, untouched by the ravages of war. The Holocaust never happened, the streets are filled with Jewish tradesmen, restaurants and small businesses; the Palace of Culture and Science, a gift from the Soviet Union to the people of Poland and one of the most recognisable Warsaw landmarks, was never built; and Poland now shares a border with China.

Nevertheless, Mela comes from a universe in which World War II did happen (Universe 1). Hence, the following conclusion can be formed: after changing the past, Mela and Anton get shifted to a parallel universe

(Universe 2) where World War II never happened. Changing the past creates a new universe with its own past influenced by the change inflicted by the characters. Upon their return to 2012, the characters land in a parallel timeline.

### *Conflicting and Unexplained Issues*

Following the above line of reasoning, if at the end of the film the characters end up in a parallel timeline, how is it then possible for Mela's friends to mistake Anton for Przemek when they meet in the Old Town? Surely, the latter had never existed in this timeline. Once more, we are left with an unexplained puzzle.

### Conclusion

Both of Machulski's time travel films fall within Frey's third category of time travel narratives. In both cases, the characters get shifted back in time, and in both they succeed in changing the future. While the plot of *EmbaSSy* results in the re-writing of 20th century world history, in the case of *How Much Does The Trojan Horse Weigh?*, the change inflicted by the time traveller is effective on a much smaller, private scale. In fact, *The Trojan Horse* accommodates both of Frey's sub-categories, as the plot involves altering the private past (and as a consequence, the future) of the characters, whilst simultaneously preserving the immutable historical timeline. Despite the fact that in both films Machulski made at least a vague attempt to explain the mechanism behind the characters' time travel (time travel portals in one case, and shock tactics in the other (i.e., a thunderbolt and a slap in the face), the proposed explanations are far from being scientific. Hence, the films fit more into the fantasy genre rather than that of science fiction. Some unexplained facts and events pointed out in this article serve as further support of this thesis. Nonetheless, Machulski's time travel narratives, with all their intricate solutions, plot twists, occasional blanks and inevitable paradoxes, constitute attractive cinematic adventures very much in line with popular Hollywood time travel blockbusters. Disguised as comedies, both productions re-visit some of the bleakest historical moments, national and global: the 1980s in the PRL<sup>1</sup> era of Poland in *The Trojan Horse*, and World War II in *EmbaSSy*. Interestingly, despite the gravity of the chosen subjects, and regardless of the dreariness of the

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1 The Polish People's Republic (PRL) was the official name for Poland between 1947 and 1989.

past socio-political times referred to, what is conspicuous in both films is the profuse sense of nostalgia.

In *The Trojan Horse*, the protagonist is shifted back to the final phase of the communist regime in Poland. While the heroine desperately tries to change her personal past, the audience is confronted with the all-too-familiar vision of the scruffy and derelict landscape that was the reality of the PRL. Empty stores, and absurd shabby spaces of milk bars<sup>2</sup> – both significant determinants of the era – together with the iconic 1980s fashion and hair styles of passers-by, provoke two paradoxical reactions: a strong resentment towards the crudity of the past on one hand, and a sense of nostalgia for old times and social unity on the other. The familiarity of pictures from the past awake memories of the pre-millennium generations, shifting them back to the times of their youth which, regardless of the communist era hardships, must strike a sentimental chord.

*EmbaSSy* first and foremost resonates with a clear longing for freedom on both a personal and national scale. By chance, the characters are faced with the opportunity to avert the darkest chapter in the history of modern mankind and, against the odds, they succeed. In the process, however, they sacrifice their own private choices for the greater good. Mela gets irreversibly separated from her husband, while Przemek and Anton shift places, marooned forever in alien time spaces. The freedom of past personal choices is reflected in the shape of the characters' present reality. A sense of nostalgia and sentiment is also prominent in *EmbaSSy*. Contemporary times are pictured as an idyll and a festival of possibilities for the individual. However, it is this alternate reality in which World War II has never happened that unveils the beauty of the old-style multicultural Poland as it might have been, if not for the war. The last sequence of the movie offering the vision of the hustle and bustle of Warsaw Old Town, wherein Hasidic Jews tend to their small businesses, is a moving commentary on the bitter results of those historical war time events.

Following the genre's tradition, Machulski's time travel films pose a "what if" question<sup>3</sup>, and by means of providing various alternative scenarios, they expose values and flaws of past and present events and people. While finding delight in painting utopian visions of altered realities, Machulski gets drawn into and, occasionally lost in, the meanderings of time travel paradoxes, as many before him have. Nevertheless, providing scientific explanations to the events in the films was never an objective.

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2 Milk bars were low-cost cafeterias serving affordable traditional meals to working class people in Poland. Over the years, milk bars have become iconic symbols of the PRL era.

3 According to Karen Hellekson, a "what if" question is the most fundamental one in speculative fiction (Bould, Butler, Roberts, & Vint, 2009, p. 453).

Rather, Machulski chose to provide the viewers with fantasy narratives offering two hours of cleansing escapism and entertainment.

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- EmbaSSy (AmbaSSada)*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra, 2013.
- Groundhog Day*, dir. Harold Ramis, USA: Columbia Pictures, 1993.
- Hour Of The Crimson Rose (Godzina pąsowej róży)*, dir. Halina Bielińska, Poland: Wytwórnia Filmów Fabularnych, 1963.
- How Much Does The Trojan Horse Weigh? (Ile waży koń trojański?)*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra, 2008.
- Kiler*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra, 1997.
- Midnight in Paris*, dir. Woody Allen, USA: Sony Pictures Classics, 2011.
- Sexmission (Seksmisja)*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Zespół Filmowy Kadr, 1984.
- Superproduction (Superprodukcja)*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra/Vision Film, 2003.
- The Adam Project*, dir. Shawn Levy, USA: Netflix, 2022.
- The Hourglass Sanatorium (Sanatorium pod klepsydrą)*, dir. Wojciech Jerzy Has, Poland: Zespół Filmowy Silesia, 1973.
- The Lullaby (Kołysanka)*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra, 2010.
- The Time Machine*, dir. George Pal, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/Galaxy Films, 1960.
- The Time Machine*, dir. Simon Wells, USA: Warner Bros., 2002.
- Vabank*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Zespół Filmowy Kadr, 1981.
- Vinci*, dir. Juliusz Machulski, Poland: Studio Filmowe Zebra, 2004.

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