

FROM THE AMERICAN WILD WEST TO BOJSZOWY:

Józef Kłyk's Westerns as Social Rituals

Today I can say that in making these films I was quite often exposing myself to ridicule. People thought I was crazy, they didn't believe that my work would amount to anything. But at the screenings the room was always full and this gave me strength.

Jozef Kłyk

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INTRODUCTION

Mutual transoceanic projections between the Americas and the rest of the world always indicate a variety of perceptions, understandings and interpretations of American culture (or cultures). They also indicate new dynamic approaches and perspectives on American cultural texts and the ways these texts are experienced, used or abused by various social, national, or ethnic groups, even those that are oceans apart, since the ocean, although it separates people with its monstrous proportions, can also connect.

When the proliferation of American popular culture is discussed, the most sensible approach explaining the interactions between cultures is Wolfgang Welsch's concept of transculturality, which assumes that cultures today do not have distinct or homogeneous forms (Welsch, 1999). Thanks to mass communication and well-developed means of transport, people function not in separate, homogeneous cultures but in peculiar cultural connection networks in which different cultures mix and intermingle. These networks also affect the lives of individuals who do not exist exclusively within their national cultures. Today it is more and more diffi-

cult to decide what belongs to a national culture and what has been annexed by it from other cultural systems. Furthermore, the criterion of cultural identity seems to be purely declarative: 'For most of us, multiple cultural connections are decisive in terms of our cultural formation. We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, emphasize that they're shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries, by Russian, German, South and North American or Japanese literature' (Welsch, 1999: 198). The flow of heterogeneous, international cultural texts meets various and very different culture users, who use texts according to their own needs, tastes, or preferences. This is especially true about standardized American pop-culture texts, which are appropriated, translated, and used in a specific and very individual way all over the world. However, it is not just a matter of meaning and senses or different interpretations of the same cultural messages, but it is a matter of the inspiration American popular culture can provide, giving new life to cultural texts or activities. As Richard Hebdige indicates,

American popular culture [...] offers a rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-assembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of combinations. And the meaning of each selection is transformed as individual objects [...] are taken out of their original historical and cultural contexts and juxtaposed against signs from other sources. (Hebdige, 1988: 74)

This always happens when a standardized text with a global reach meets local cultures and individuals transform it, with the use of local culture and its values, into a new hybrid form. The post-modern territory provides many opportunities for these kinds of intertextual games in which either a global, mainly American, formula—genre, structure, type of character, etc.—is filled in with local content, or in which American content is adjusted and adapted to specific local forms. Both of these uses become controversial and are very often accused of killing national culture, character, and identity. However, American culture's potential for inspiring other culture representatives in a valuable and creative way can be remarkable.

This paper discusses a very special case of a unique and ennobling use of American popular culture for promoting native traditions

and strengthening cultural identity. The figure of Polish-Silesian amateur filmmaker Józef Kłyk and his works have long been noticed and appreciated, mostly locally and almost exclusively within the context of niche amateur film work. Kłyk is a creator of so-called Silesian Westerns. When discussed within a broader context of cultural studies, his films become an example of how reception, appropriation and transformation of global cultural products in a local cultural and social environment are shaped by hybridity and then used for fulfilling the local community's needs.

WESTERNS AS GLOBAL STORIES¹

Westerns are originally American stories which, despite their apparent geographical and historical location, have spread to various cultures around the world. They have served as inspiration for screenwriters, film directors and actors in, just to mention a few examples, the Italian 'spaghetti Westerns', the so-called 'Easterns' (made in Eastern Europe, mainly in East Germany), and movies based on the narrative patterns, motifs, or characters of Westerns and derived from distant and exotic countries such as Japan, Thailand, and China. John Cawelti explains the popularity of Westerns:

Of all the major popular genres, the Western most seemed to express some sense of uniqueness of the American experience and of the imagined exceptionalism of America, and a Western, even when made in Italy or Spain, or enacted in theme parks in Germany or quick-draw clubs in France, retains its deep connection with the American West—the West that has always been one of the central defining factors of American national identity. (Cawelti, 1999: 5)

Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper, in the introduction to their recently published book *International Westerns: Re-Locating the Frontier*, justify the popularity of Westerns with the universal nature of the heroes who fill the functions needed in any society, not only in nineteenth-century America:

¹ This paragraph and some parts of the following paragraphs were used in a modified form and in Polish in an article, 'Między Śląskiem a Teksasem – Śląskie westerny Józefa Kłyka jako przykład pamięci protetycznej', which was accepted for publication in Vol.1/2015 of 'Przegląd Polonijny'.

The icons and themes of the classic American Western belong to a particular moment in U.S. history, and it addresses the issue and processes that were, in that moment, defining the nation and its culture. Those issues [...] are not, however, unique to the United States.

Heroes of the traditional West have long been recognized as guardians of civilization positioned with one foot in the wild and one foot in the civilized world—bearing the responsibility of maintaining the boundaries between order and chaos, civilization and barbarism. [...] They were champions of the moral order and icons of national identity, playing a leading role not only in the taming of the West, but in expanding and extending American values and lifeways across borders, boundaries and ideologies. [...] This vision of the American west, immortalized, promoted and expanded in countless cinematic narratives, hinged on notions of progress, ideas and ingenuity in the service of the project of nation-making. (Miller and Van Riper, 2014: xii)

The universal character of the heroes and problems they had to face made Westerns comprehensible for people of different, often very remote, cultures.

SILESIA HISTORY AND PROBLEMS WITH IDENTITY

In order to understand how the social and cultural importance of Kłyk's artistic activity results from the history and special experience of Silesian people, a short introduction of the region and its tangled history has to be given. Silesia is a region located mostly in Poland, with smaller parts located in the Czech Republic and Germany. The region is rich in mineral and natural resources, especially coal, and includes several important industrial areas. Throughout its history, Silesia has always been under someone's reign, has belonged to other countries, and has never been autonomous. Silesians have often been under the repressive influence of foreigners who imposed their religion, language, and culture on them: in the 10th century the Czechs controlled Silesia, then Poland took the region over for four centuries, then, for two centuries, again the Czechs, and then the Austrians for another two. In 1742, most of the Silesian region was conquered by Prussia. At that point, what had previously been merely an insignificant Austrian province became an important economic part of Prussia. The Prussians brought colonists to these lands and sought to Germanize all areas of life. Things became worse after 1871, when Silesia, along with Prussia, became part of the unified Ger-

man Empire and German authorities introduced a very strict policy of Germanization called *Kulturkampf*. At the end of the nineteenth century, Silesia developed economically, with new coal mines, steel mills, and railways. However, the economic development did not solve the national problems of the Silesian people.

After World War I, the easternmost part of the Silesia region was awarded to Poland by the victorious Allies, but not for long, since in 1938 it was annexed by the Third Reich. After World War II, according to the Potsdam Agreement, most of the Silesian territory was transferred to Poland. As a result, the majority of the native German population was expelled and replaced by Polish settlers who had themselves been expelled from the Eastern Polish borderlands taken over by the Soviet Union. Since 1989, nothing has changed in the Silesian geopolitical situation. What has changed, however, is the attitude of Silesians toward their Silesian origins. Due to their complicated and turbulent history, Silesian people have problems defining their identity. They consider themselves neither German, Polish, nor Czech but rather form a separate, polyglot society of Silesians (also called Szlonzoks or Slunzaks) whose citizens declare themselves to be members of two or more national groups (Kamusella, 2007).

During the Communist era, being Silesian carried a risk of ostracism, and people were afraid to admit to their Silesian roots or speak Silesian dialect. After 1989, more people started to declare their Silesian origin and, what is more important, this tendency is currently experiencing an upward trend. In the 2002 census, only 173,000² citizens declared Silesian roots, whereas in the 2011 census 817,000 Polish citizens declared themselves Silesian.³

Silesian culture reflects the historical experience of Silesian people. It is characterized by diversity resulting from the intermingling of different cultural traditions: German, Polish, Czech, and Jewish. Silesian dialect reflects the impact of many cultures

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2 Report of National Population and Housing Census, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/PUBL_ludnosc_stan_i_struktura_demograficzno_spoleczna.pdf, p.44. Accessed 14 November, 2013.

3 Report of National Population and Housing Census, http://www.stat.gov.pl/cps/rde/xbcr/gus/lud_raport_z_wynikow_NSP2011.pdf:p.106. Accessed 14 November, 2013.

in the region. On the one hand, it is considered to be the best-preserved example of traditional Polish speech, while on the other it contains a large number of words of Germanic and Czech origin—which is why it is considered, in fact, an independent Silesian language. For Silesians, their language is one of the most important elements consolidating their sense of ethnic bonds. At various stages of Silesian history, the use of Silesian language was suppressed either by the Germans or Poles. Recently, researchers have observed an increased interest in knowledge of the Silesian language, especially among young people (Tambor, 2010), which also confirms that there has been an increase in a Silesian sense of ethnic pride. This has happened thanks to the many enthusiasts and activists for whom the cultivation of a Silesian identity has become a passion and an important purpose in life.

The presentation of Silesian history seems to be justified in the context of the discussed phenomenon: when an alien, in this case American, cultural text is taken over and used in order to support the building of a Silesian cultural identity. Centuries of Silesian experience with the imposition of foreign cultures led Silesians to acquire the ability to tame what is alien and hostile and transform it into something familiar and friendly. The main purpose of Kłyk's film activities is the promotion and preservation of a Silesian identity: the telling of Silesian history, and the description of customs, food, costumes, and landscapes is done entirely in Silesian language.

Józef Kłyk comes from Bojszowy, a small village located in Upper Silesia, near Auschwitz, with a population of slightly over three thousand. He was born in 1950 and from an early age was fascinated with cinema. He pursued his passion not only by working in a traveling cinema and watching movies; when he turned 17, he bought an amateur Soviet camera and started making films. From the very beginning he was fascinated with American movies. Kłyk is an amateur driven by passion. He has not attended any film schools or professional film trainings. The only filmmaking education that he received was from watching Hollywood movies. By watching the same film several times and carefully

observing camera settings, the use of light, film-editing, and narrative solutions, he learned the craft of film. His first films were inspired by the silent slapstick comedies of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd. As Kłyk recalls, his first artistic choices were not due to conscious or creative decisions but resulted from the technological limitations of his camera: 'My Soviet camera did not record the soundtrack and worked at the speed of 16 frames per second, producing accelerated motion and, in a natural manner, a comic effect'.⁴ At the same time, at the very beginning of his film activities, Kłyk became fascinated by American Westerns. The Polish communist authorities, which were very critical and wary of everything that was of US origin, did not object to Westerns, probably recognizing the format as safe and not affecting the ideological loyalty of Polish citizens: 'It was regarded as "ideologically correct" because it examined the relationship between individuals and society and the tension between individual and community priorities' (Gadomska, 1998: 18). Hence, Poles were familiar with Hollywood classics such as *High Noon* (1954), *3:10 to Yuma* (1957), *Rio Bravo* (1959), and many others. The Polish national TV station presented a series about the American Wild West; *Bonanza*, with the Cartwright family, was known to almost every Pole. Westerns were very often the only alternative to Soviet film productions, which were hated by most people, thus they became cult films watched by Poles over and over again. Literature about cowboys and Native Americans was also very popular in Poland, such as James Fenimore Cooper and his idealistic vision of the Wild West and Karl May's adventure novels set in the American Old West, such as *Winnetou* and *Old Shatterhand*. Within this context, it is easy to understand Kłyk's fascination with this genre and his familiarity with its formal solutions and narrative structures.

At first, Kłyk based his stories on original American Western plots. His first Western, *The Stagecoach Robbery* (1968), was a short film based on Edwin Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), but unexpectedly, even for Kłyk himself, the movie turned into a comedy. The same surprising effect was achieved in the next, much longer production, *The Stagecoach to Kansas* (1969), inspired

4 Józef Kłyk in an interview conducted by the author on July 10, 2013.

by John Ford's Hollywood classic, *The Stagecoach* (1939). The comic effects emerged on the one hand because of an unskillful use of the means of cinematic expression, and, on the other, because of deficiencies and imperfections of settings, costumes, and props. Kłyk recalls from the movie set that 'The stagecoaches were riding along the dirt road, because horses were used to it and refused to move anywhere else. Cowboys and Indians were running through a potato field and we had an Indian infantry, because there were not enough horses in the village'. He learned from his own mistakes, still experimenting and trying to use simple measures and procedures in order to obtain the effects that he observed in Hollywood films with budgets of several million dollars.

Soon repeating and imitating American models was not enough for Kłyk, and his Westerns became more than just ludicrous playing around and blind imitation. He admittedly retained the classic Western formula but used it for different content, aesthetics, and values. He created his own unique way of telling stories about cowboys, settlers, and Native Americans by developing a new subgenre—the Silesian Western, also sarcastically called the 'kielbasa Western' in reference to the spaghetti Westerns. Kłyk went beyond making amateur films, becoming a strong director with an individual, characteristic style and with a constant message addressed to his viewers: 'Remember about Silesia; its people, history and culture'. His next Westerns, *The Man from Nowhere* (1980/83), *Full Death* (1984/86) and *The Free Man* (1988/91), form a Silesian trilogy titled *On the Trail of Lawlessness* and belong to the most famous part of Kłyk's film achievements.

The inspiration for the change appeared after Kłyk had read a book by Professor Andrzej Brożek on the history of Silesian immigrants to America, called *Ślązacy w Teksasie. Relacje o najstarszych osadach polskich w Ameryce (Silesians in Texas. Accounts of the First Polish Settlements in the United States)*. It was a history of human despair and determination, of dreams for a better future, and of a severe reality that left no place for illusions.

ACROSS LANDS AND OCEANS—SILESIA IN TEXAS

In the autumn of 1854, a group of 150 Silesians, poor farmers from villages near Opole, left from Wrocław for Brema, and after

about 60 days on the sea they reached Galveston. After two weeks of a difficult hike along the San Antonio River through a wild and unknown prairie, they reached the mouth of the river, where they decided to establish a settlement called Panna Maria (Brożek, 1972: 14). In American documents, Panna Maria is registered as the first Polish settlement in the United States. During the Civil War, Polish immigrants were conscripted and forced to fight. After the war, when Texan troops left the forts that had been used to defend the settlers against Native Americans, the Native American attacks intensified. The situation worsened when hundreds of ex-slaves who had fled from plantations and farms were looking for new settlement possibilities in towns. In addition, Ku Klux Klan actions were becoming increasingly frequent and aggressive and were directed against not only Afro-Americans but all 'strangers'.

The *lawlessness*, guns, constant Indian attacks, and many fascinating stories fit perfectly into the Western format. Kłyk directed his camera at the Silesians, among whom there were gunmen, sheriffs, clergymen, and beautiful women. Both the internal relations of the Silesian immigrants and how they interacted with the other inhabitants of Texas became the subject of the Silesian trilogy.

The first part, *The Man from Nowhere*, was inspired by the movie *Shane* (1953) by George Stevens, in which a young gunfighter helps the local community of farmers against a rich cattleman who wants to take over their land. Stevens' Western is a typical example of a classic Western. This is one reason why it became interesting for Kłyk, while another reason was the story of the solitary, righteous man fighting against evil.

In Kłyk's movie, the main protagonist is Wawrzyn Złotko, a Silesian who was compelled by the German oppressors to leave his homeland, which was not even on any map, since Poland had been partitioned and Silesia was under German rule. Wawrzyn was a real man from nowhere. He arrived in Texas and became an outlaw, a cowboy with a bad past who, as it happens in classic Westerns, after completing a moral obligation (to avenge the death of Silesian immigrants killed by bandits), begins a new life in a new place—the Silesian settlement, Panna Maria, in Texas.

Other parts of Kłyk's trilogy continue the story of Wawrzyn's life and his fight against all of the manifestations of evil and injustice that he faces in the name of the community of Silesian immigrants in Texas. Wawrzyn is a typical hero of American Westerns: very manly and brave with life experience that allows him to build a very unambiguous code of values which he follows. He is uncompromising and knows that he can rely only on himself. On the other hand, he is a typical Silesian, for whom the community he comes from and its values (religiosity, solidarity and tradition) are very important. The Silesians in Kłyk's Westerns represent the highest moral principles to which other social groups in Texas should aspire. In *The Free Man*, the last part of the trilogy, Wawrzyn returns to his homeland because he misses his country and feels Texas would never become his home. Wawrzyn represents the mental dilemmas of many Silesian immigrants, their longings, pains, and nostalgia for their lost homeland. Wawrzyn returns also because he feels his cowboy effectiveness is needed—it is 1939, and the Germans have just invaded Poland. Wawrzyn, as a Texan cowboy, fights against the Nazis on his horse—he kills many, but finally he also gets killed.

In 1999, Kłyk returned to Texan themes and directed another Silesian Western, *Two from Texas*, telling the story of the Silesian historical figure Marcin Mróz (M'Rose), a famous cattle thief in Texas, and one of his friends, a folk hero, gunfighter, and lawyer named John Wesley Hardin, whom he met in El Paso. When Martin was imprisoned, Hardin seduced Martin's wife, a beautiful former prostitute named Helena. At first friends and then rivals, both were shot dead by Texas rangers and lie side by side in the Concordia cemetery in El Paso. Kłyk tries to stick closely to historical facts in his movie, but the overall story is slightly dramatized and embellished.

Two from Texas, even more clearly than the trilogy, shows where Kłyk places his interest. The stories, spectacular adventures of the heroes in the Texan environment, are only an excuse to present traditional Silesian customs, rituals, costumes, and language. This goal determines that Kłyk's Westerns are set in a very classic formula, built upon typical, regular narrative solutions, conventional plots and themes. Will Wright, in his classic work on Westerns,

Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western, describes the classic Western as

the prototype of all Westerns, 'the one people think of when they say, "All Westerns are alike." It is the story of the lone stranger who rides into a troubled town and cleans it up, winning the respect of the town folk and the love of the schoolmarm [...]. The classical plot defines the genre [...] and the other plots—vengeance, transition, professional—are all built upon its symbolic foundation and depend upon this foundation for their meaning. (Wright, 1975: 32)

Kłyk's Westerns contain all of the required structural elements of the classical model—the hero, society, and villains—and the narrative structures developed in the classical plot order. Kłyk uses this very classic Western formula intentionally and rigorously. By using the commonly known, predictable, and transparent Western format, Kłyk draws the audience's attention to other aspects of the screen reality, namely the presentation and promotion of Silesian culture and tradition. The Silesian identity is the most important protagonist of his Westerns, and it dominates all other aspects of the picture. This does not mean that Kłyk ignores the Texan reality: he studies American Old West culture very carefully and is very meticulous about details. However, when something of particular importance for Silesians is to be shown or said, the whole dynamic Western action is slowed down and the Wild West either becomes a mere backdrop or completely disappears to give place to Bojszowy and its people, history, and tradition. Kłyk presents, for example, the ceremony of a traditional Silesian wedding. His camera slowly shows the details of a traditional Silesian wedding dress, wedding table decorations, and even a wedding meal. While watching these scenes, it becomes clear why Silesian Westerns have been nicknamed 'kielbasa Westerns'—the characters celebrating Silesian holidays and customs eat traditional Silesian delicacies, among which sausage is of particular importance.

WESTERNS AS RITUALS

A discussion of the ritualization processes present in Kłyk's films should begin with the genre itself. For film art, the forming of a genre depends primarily on the stability of the conventions. Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator

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and his audience beforehand, consisting of things such as favorite plots, stereotyped characters, accepted ideas, commonly known metaphors, and other linguistic devices (Cawelti, 2001: 204). Conventions grow from repetition and familiarity; they 'represent familiar shared images and meanings and they assert an ongoing continuity of values' (204). Ritual, also based on repetition, is 'a sequence of actions performed in a strict, pre-established pattern whose purpose is to reinforce certain beliefs, practices and values, as well as to produce some real benefit for the participant(s)' (Clark and Clanton, 2012: 10).

Rick Altman, in his 1977 text 'Towards a Theory of Genre Film' (republished later as a chapter in his 1987 book *The American Film Musical*), distinguishes seven characteristics which 'identify and define the genre film' (Altman, 1977: 38). According to Altman, all genre films are dualistic, because they build their meanings on oppositions, juxtaposing

[...] cultural values with countercultural ones, for example through constant doubling of protagonists representing opposing values, aesthetics or morality: good and bad characters, beautiful and ugly, rich and poor. Genre films are also repetitive, because they constantly use the same stories, motives, characters and settings, which are not only repeated but also accumulated. The fact that genre film are both repetitive and cumulative in their effect naturally makes them extremely predictable. (Altman, 1977: 39).

Watching genre films, we can always predict what will happen with the characters. 'People go to genre films to renew contact with old friends, to hear old stories, to participate in events with which they somehow already seem familiar' (39). Furthermore, genre films are nostalgic—they are set in times and places important for the nation's history. With all of these features, genre films have become open to many interpretations and always have other meanings hidden under the story they tell or the picture they present. The symbolic qualities of genre films make them designed to play a fully functional role 'by contenting the audience with the status quo by reestablishing social equilibrium and balancing sexual, financial, or national insecurity' (40). With these seven attributes, genre film corresponds to one general form:

That form is *ritual*. Ritual is dualistic; like the myths to which it is related. Ritual is repetitive, both within the individual occurrence and over a period of time [...].

Ritual is cumulative; no single ritual phenomenon expresses the totality of a cultural myth, but taken together the sum of ritual activities determines the myth. Ritual is predictable; it always follows a regular pattern [...] Ritual is nostalgic; it seeks to establish continuity between past and present. (Altman, 1977: 41)

The key aspects common to genre film and ritual make the watching and reception of the films a ritualized form of activity. For the Western, as a typical representative of genre cinema, social ritual is an important dimension.

The Western, through its narrative conventions, carries out a variety of cultural functions in a unified way. It can be defined in terms of paradigm for the selection of certain plots, characters and settings of such a sort that these narrative elements not only create effective stories, but become endowed with certain aspects of collective ritual, game and dream. (Cawelti, 1999: 19)

In a classic Western, as in a ritual, 'some pairs of opposing social and cultural forces come together: belief and behavior, tradition and change, order and chaos, nature and culture' (Bell, 1992: 16). Classic Westerns are also modern American morality plays—they always present a strong moral story. Like every genre film, Westerns perform an important social function: in symbolic and non-invasive ways, they answer viewers' problematic questions and relieve social tensions within a community. American Westerns, as well as other genre films produced on a mass scale by Hollywood film studios and distributed globally, fulfill the ritual function superficially. They function as ad hoc dosed pills which discharge emotions to a multicultural and multinational audience.

Kłtyk's Westerns, classic in form and filled with local content of sacred importance for Silesians, became a kind of *gesta deorum* telling the stories of Silesian heroes, a record of Silesian history and of the traditions which are being slowly displaced by global trends and cultural phenomena. Watching Kłtyk's movies is a social activity, experienced in groups, in the company of friends and neighbors. The films are important not only for people from Bojszowry but also for Texans of Silesian origin, descendants of the nineteenth-

century immigrants who see Kłtyk's movies as a record of their own history and as an opportunity to return to their roots.

WESTERN-MAKING AS PLAY AND SOCIAL RITUAL

Kłtyk's Westerns are ritualized not only at the level of perception during the act of viewing; the process of ritualization takes place also during the film-production process. The presence of ritualistic aspects can be observed in the director's actions as well as the activities of the film crew: members of the Bojszowy community participate in the film production as actors, extras, technical assistants, etc.

For the director, the process is a kind of mystery in which Kłtyk organizes the whole narrative world. Being simultaneously a film director and a cameraman, he is a demiurge. The entire creative process, from the idea of the story he wants to tell through the whole organization of a movie set, costumes, and actors until the premiere of the movie, is a sequence of repetitive operations that must be completed, a sort of rite he celebrates, creating his narrative world and turning it into a mythical story. In his Westerns, Kłtyk also plays the main characters around whom the narrative world is organized. *Wawrzyn Złotko* in the trilogy and Sheriff John Rzeppa in *Two from Texas* let Kłtyk retain the position of creator and participant at the same time. The independence of an amateur filmmaker puts Kłtyk in the position of an artisan who creates his work according to his own vision, and, although the film is an art form based on mechanical reproduction, Kłtyk's works are not totally emancipated from ritualistic aspects. His creative and financial independence, total devotion to every project, and the involvement of the local community of Bojszowy in the production cycle make his films very special and unique. Considering that many of Kłtyk's films are preserved only on master tapes and have never been reproduced, we can talk about the special 'aura' they possess.

Another form of ritual takes place within the Bojszowy community, for which Kłtyk's film production became something more than just the occasional actions of a crazy filmmaker. Kłtyk has been making his films since the 1960s and has become an important cultural institution in Bojszowy and Upper Silesia. His film activities have become ritualized in many ways. Ritualized activities

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constitute interaction between the collective representation of social life and individual experience and behavior. Bojszowy residents are actively involved in Kłyk's film-making. They feel responsible and contribute to every film project. They either act or provide various things needed on location: costumes, furniture, food. They lend their houses, gardens and outbuildings, domestic animals, and children. One of the farmers converted a britzka into a stagecoach; another changed his workhorses into wild horses. Kłyk himself made many elements for reconstruction of the Old West, such as guns and horse saddles, and he even reconstructed a typical Western saloon in the basement of his house. He is very resourceful—within two hours and with no budget he is able to organize an entire movie set including technical equipment, cattle and horses. The Bojszowy community, led by Kłyk's passion and determination, have built a kind of classic Western town with all of the necessary landmarks—a farmer's store, general store, and saloon.

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According to Victor Turner, 'Rite affords a creative anti-structure that is distinguished from the rigid maintenance of social orders, hierarchies and traditional forms' (Bell, 1992: 20–21). In this sense, the fictional worlds of genre films create for the participants a platform of ritualized entertainment. Just as in traditional religious performances such as Nativity or Passion plays the same actors every year become Jesus Christ or Pontius Pilate, in Kłyk's Westerns the same fellow countryman plays a sheriff or an Indian chief. The film roles often reflect the social position of the actor—for example, one eminent and charismatic lady from Bojszowy always plays the Silesian mother in Texas.

Kłyk [...] does not seek any professional actors. His actors are Bojszowy residents, where almost everyone is an actor. At Kłyk's request the local owners of cows, horses, carts and carriages arrive at the film set. Also a local quartet and actors, each with his own set of costumes. If it is necessary, Kłyk himself sews the right costume. Everything happens spontaneously and for free. (Szwiec, 2012: 141)⁵

5 'Kłyk [...] nie zabiega o zawodowego aktora. W jego filmach grają mieszkańcy Bojszów i okolic. Tam chyba każdy jest aktorem. Na wezwanie Kłyka na planie stawiają się właściciele krów, koni, wozów i powozów. Stawia się lokalny kwartet muzyczny i odtwórcy ról—większość ma już własne stroje.

For the people of Bojszowy, the production activities for Kłyk's Westerns have become a pastime of sorts. The only time when the films can be made is Sunday, when, after compulsory participation in church service, people dress up, bring necessary objects, and gather on the film set to become cowboys, sheriffs, or bandits.

Normally in such communities leisure time is spent on entertainment such as dances or sport events, but in Bojszowy they make films about the Silesian past. For these people, making Westerns is a ritual of play and entertainment. Johan Huizinga, who has claimed that 'play existed before any culture', defined it as

[...] a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary life' as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. (Huizinga, 1955: 17)

In this definition, Huizinga suggests that play is a denial of an ordinary life; it is non-serious because it is separated from reality. However, 'this does not mean that play is unreal or unimportant. As a force activity, play expresses some sense of what a self is; play attests to some aspects of one's "real" or "true" self. In this sense, it is very real activity' (Freezell, 2006: 28). Playing in Kłyk's film is acted out through social relationships. During the filmmaking process, people who take part in Kłyk's films build new liaisons and relationships and strengthen the ones already existing. Playing fictional characters from the American Wild West allows them to express their true personalities without the fear of speaking out or expressing disagreement. According to Sally Bailey,

Play provides emotional and intellectual distance so that difficult issues can be experimented with. Much of play is done within a distancing structure of some kind. Rules of behaviours that are followed within a game apply to everyone and create a level playing field in which skills can be tested without risking actual loss of status, money or life. Fictional characters that are played out within dramatized scenes under the guise of 'just pretend' allow players to put themselves into the shoes of people very similar or very unlike themselves (Bailey, 2011: 147).

Jeśli jest potrzeba, Kłyk osobiście szyje odpowiedni kostium. Oczywiście, wszystko to dzieje się dość spontanicznie i za darmo' (author's translation).

Bojszowy residents are not, and never will be, real cowboys or Native Americans, but they can perform them in Kłyk's movies. They can 'temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive and the risky' (Schechner, 2013: 52): bank robbing, killing a bandit, or being killed themselves. Play and ritual have much in common, since they both lead people into

[a] second reality, separate from ordinary life. This reality is one when people can become selves other than their daily selves. When they temporarily become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus, ritual and play transform people either permanently or temporarily. (Schechner, 2013: 52)

Kłyk's actors, who are hard-working farmers in daily life, full of worries, can become someone else for the period of filming, someone whom they could only watch on the screen. As in the ritual activity of watching a genre film, making the films has also become a ritual for the Bojszowy community.

However, Silesian Westerns are not made exclusively for the pure joy of the filmmaker and the Bojszowy residents. They are all involved in the outcome of this joyful activity: namely, describing and thereby preserving Silesian history and culture.

Kłyk uses two basic functions of cinema as a medium—a chronicler's function and an educational one. The camera becomes a chronicler that records events, people, and customs. Stories reconstructed from Silesian history are preserved by contemporary Silesians who, thanks to Kłyk's films, are preserving themselves for future generations of Silesians. From Kłyk's movies, descendants will learn not only about the fate of Silesians in Texas but also about Kłyk, his actors, and their rituals performed in front of the camera. Kłyk not only reconstructs the past but also saves the present, since through his works he provides knowledge of past generations as well as of himself and his contemporaries.

Kłyk's Westerns, although sometimes using a comic convention, tell stories of sacred importance for Silesian people, both those from Bojszowy and those from Panna Maria in Texas, with the help of the Western movie formula. Despite the oceans dividing them, the history of two nations has been told and mythologized.

CONCLUSION

The American Wild West transformed into mythology by American popular culture has made its mark on cultures around the world. Likewise, the Western genre has also been transformed through its encounter with different cultures. 'The Western's capacity to accommodate many different kinds of meaning, the archetypal pattern of heroic myth, the need for social ritual and for the disguised expression of latent motives and tension made the genre successful, as popular art and entertainment' (Cawelti, 1999: 56).

A significant part of Kłyk's work was inspired by texts of popular American culture: genre movies that were often accused, especially after revolutionary changes in the approach to cinema art initiated by the French New Wave, of thematic uniformity, lack of creativity, and closing of film stories within rigid narrative and aesthetic frames. The activities of the Silesian amateur filmmaker show how American culture can teach and inspire. Kłyk learned his film craft from Hollywood productions, first imitating the film expression and storylines, and then, as he was developing his artistic skills, more and more often going beyond the classic Hollywood solutions, consequently creating his own unique, original, *auteur* style. The most interesting and important aspect is the purpose of Kłyk's creative activities, which is protecting Silesian cultural identity and preserving Silesian history and tradition. Kłyk's activities show what possibilities the standardized texts of popular culture give when they meet a creative and talented recipient. For Kłyk, American culture is only a starting point; his Westerns, though undoubtedly grown out of American culture, have become regional, typically Silesian cultural texts. 'With popular culture, as much as with the fine arts, a genre needs the interest of original and imaginative artists who are capable of revitalizing its conventions and stereotypes to express contemporaneous concerns' (Cawelti, 1999: 56). Using the rigid formula of the classic Western, Kłyk transplanted the mythic American West to Bojszowy and proved how flexible the formula can be when it is used by an ingenious artist. Though viewers of Kłyk's Westerns might be distracted by the awkwardness and clumsiness of some solutions, these films still have to be looked at as texts made not for financial profit but because of a clear social need, as evidenced by the involve-

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ment of Bojszowy residents, as well as for the director's artistic need of expression. 'Adopting the Western film to settings, audiences, and cinematic traditions beyond the United States enriched the genre with new geographic realities, new histories, and new collisions between once-separate peoples' (Miller and Van Riper, 2014: xv). In the Silesian cultural context, Kłyk discovered the new potential of Westerns and used it in a very creative way to connect the once-separate past and present, as well as people from Silesia with those from Texas, despite time and distance.

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