

# An Upside-Down World

*The Adventure of a Good Citizen* by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson as a portmanteau film

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The film by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson *Przygoda człowieka poczciwego* (*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*) was created in 1937 as the fifth film made by the couple; it is at the same time the oldest of their films to have survived the WWII <sup>1</sup>.

Stefan Themerson in a letter to Clyde Jeavons from the Film Archive in London of 28 January 1975 points, that one, a bit unusual characteristic of the film is the fact that it can be played from the end to the beginning (once the sound synchronisation is maintained) <sup>2</sup>. In the book: *Themersonowie. Szkice biograficzne* (*Themersons. Biographical sketches*) Adriana Prodeus writes: *We do not know, however, whether anybody really tried to do it* <sup>3</sup>. It seems that despite the increasing interest in the Themersons' heritage in recent years nobody has analysed *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* from this perspective <sup>4</sup>. It appears that the backwards projection in this case is truly possible. What is more, it reveals new ways of perception and interpretation of the film.

The lost work of the Themersons entitled *Apteka* (*The pharmacy*, 1930) is considered to be the first Polish avant-garde film; however it is precisely the seven years older *Adventure...* read backwards that allows us to appreciate the intellectual flair and far-reaching look of the Themersons. Marcin Giżycki, emphasising the originality of the film wrote: *When talking about the wealth of means used – it was undoubtedly the most advanced film among all the works by the artists* <sup>5</sup>. *In addition to the original photos processed in various ways (accelerations, backwards movement, images in negative, etc.), unconventional shots (e.g. from a camera placed on its side) there were also lyrical fragments composed from abstract light reflexes or even, what becomes apparent only when analysing single frames, also abstract effects painted directly on the tape. Usually these are only “interjections” without a direct connection to the plot. Hence, taking into the account both the realisation technique and the structure of the whole, we have to consider “The Adventure...” to be a complex film collage, however, not without a linear narrative* <sup>6</sup>. The Themersons' precision – upon the discovery of additional ways to perceive the film – proves to be the watchmaker's and this way the almost 10-minute projection of the film unexpectedly doubles its length. Maybe the most unusual thing about this film experiment, also highlighted by Giżycki, is the linearity of *The Adventure...* Despite all the formal wealth of this poetic work, its plot reveals in the traditional cause and effect way and the film has a classical beginning, development and ending. Let us recall the film's plot in short.

The protagonist of the picture is a clerk, the good citizen of the title, who overhears the following sentence on the phone: *Even if you walk backwards there won't*

*be a hole in the sky!* These are the words spoken by a carpenter to a couple of workers who are taking a wardrobe with a mirror out of his workshop in a rather awkward way; one of them is walking backwards. The clerk treats the words literally. They become an impulse to change his former, ordered and conformist, existence. He puts down the receiver and carefully walks out of the office walking backwards. By accident he bumps into the workers carrying the wardrobe; in the confusion he takes the place of one of them. From now on, carrying the wardrobe with the other worker, they walk – the protagonist still backwards – towards the forest. Such behaviour arouses protests – a crowd appears with slogans *Down with walking backwards! We all walk forwards! For sure there will be a hole in the sky!* For the clerk the forest becomes a land in which the reality reveals its poetic possibilities: in a way the wardrobe becomes their catalyst. He is followed to the forest by the group of protesters but they find only a wardrobe with a mirror, but without the back. At the end of the film the protagonist appears again sitting on a chimney with a flute in his hand. Looking into the camera he says to the spectators: *You must understand the metaphor Ladies and Gentlemen!* Then we see a child taking his first steps. After this the clerk sitting on the chimney appears once more and this is the end of the film.

Projection of the film backwards proves to be not only an “accidental” possibility of the film but a well thought out, coherent concept. What story develops this time? The film starts with the clerk sitting on a chimney, right after there is a shot of a child walking backwards across the middle of the frame. In the next frame we see the man again jumping down from the roof to appear in the next frame in a forest where he is observed by the gathered crowd. After leaving the forest, carrying the wardrobe, the clerk walks across the city so at the end of his journey he can sit at his desk in the office and... call the carpenter. In the last frame we see hands holding drumsticks hitting the bowler hat like a drum. The film can be also seen backwards in a mirror image (sic!), however this does not change its message in a significant way.

The wardrobe in the backwards projection maintains its poetic possibilities. This time the participants of the demonstration walk back through it so they can continue marching backwards. It seems that such a function of the wardrobe with mirror allows us to treat it as a metaphor for art which changed our perception of reality, knocking us out of our previous habits <sup>7</sup>. We should not forget that during the backwards projection, the wardrobe (i.e. art) also becomes a vehicle for returning to “normality”; the clerk comes back to his place in the line. However it happens only for a moment; in an appropriate moment – during the projection of the film from the beginning – the art (wardrobe) will enable him to come back to the poetic dimension of reality.

What is interesting, since during the first projection (let us call it traditional or classic) after bumping into the wardrobe the protagonist walks mainly backwards, in the case of the backwards projection he moves normally, forward. He is contrasted by the rebelling crowd walking backwards while still carrying the boards with the slogans *No to walking backwards!, We all walk forward* which this time sound ironic, even provocative <sup>8</sup>. Also one of the workers carrying the wardrobe walks backwards (one of them is carrying the wardrobe walking backwards, the other walking forward). The last frame of the film, presenting the drumsticks hitting a head in a bowler hat like a drum, can be in this case treated as a dream of the clerk falling asleep at his desk, and mixes the reality with a dream.



*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, dir. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1937)



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It is impossible not to notice the self-reference character of the film by the Themersons which proves its surfictional nature<sup>9</sup>. I have taken the notion of surfiction from Raymond Federman, it means – in short – an action within art (Federman refers to literature) which reveals the fictional nature of the created reality. Federman goes further in his deliberations and as surfictional considers actions of human beings which make us aware of the fictitious nature of life.

The question remains – how could we interpret the beginning of the film with the characters and content appearing before the good citizen gets up from his desk and starts his unusual adventure? Already in the first frame we see a man in a bowler hat who looks carefully to his right and left. Then we see boards with arrows and inscriptions: “right” and “left”. A moment later the frame is divided in two (admittedly it is not ideally symmetrical, similarly to the scene with the drumsticks right at the beginning of the film) with a wardrobe with mirror from which come out – at the same time in negative and positive – characters of the film. In the next frame again we see the arrows and a moment later the head of the good citizen presented in the familiar configuration – once from the right, once from the left side (looking once one way, once the other). This situation is concluded by a symmetrical presentation of his head, this time seen from the back.

Already the beginning of the film suggests the omnipresent symmetry which – as it appears – refers not only to the conventional plot of the film, but also to the doubling that results from the possibility of its “second” reading. Moreover, the film seems to have no end since the end of every subsequent projection becomes the beginning of another, and hence the projection of the film itself can last an eternity; this is a “vicious circle” with no exit. Thus created symmetry becomes in a special way an ideal symmetry<sup>10</sup>.

If we look for a wider context in which we could place the work by the Themersons it appears that precisely the circularity of its structure can be a clue: the beginning of the film which is its end and the end that at the same time becomes the new beginning. Such a structure requires the spectator to go beyond his/her previous reception habits. The Themersons seem to be ahead of their time because they foreshadow by a several decades the experiments of structural and extended cinema.

Gene Youngblood, the author of *Expanded Cinema* (1970), describes the films that in the first place require the spectators to change their awareness: *When we say expanded cinema we actually mean expanded consciousness. (...) Expanded cinema is not a movie at all: like life it is a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes*<sup>11</sup>. Maybe even more precise here would be the term Youngblood used in his book: *synaesthetic cinema*. As Youngblood wrote, *synaesthesia is the harmony of different or opposing impulses produced by a work of art*<sup>12</sup>. As Giżycki suggests synaesthetic art is overwhelming and fully aware of the means it uses.

The similarity between the film by the Themersons and the structural cinema lies in the emphasis given – through its special form – to the meta-discursive character of the film work<sup>13</sup>. It is worth remembering that structural film is one of these phenomena that in fact do not have a unanimous definition. According to P. Adams Sitney, who introduced this notion in 1969, the structural film has four main features. These are: static, fixed position of the camera (static frame immo-

bilises the spectator's point of view) (1), trembling, blinking, stroboscopic effect (2), multiple repetition of the same frame (or the same series of frames) copied on tape – the film loop effect (3), repeated filming of images presented on film or TV screen, that is refilming (4) <sup>14</sup>.

Kluszczyński adds that according to Sitney structural film may have only one of the above-mentioned features or not have any at all and still be a part of the said trend. Why is it so? Kluszczyński argues that the structural character of the film (understood as metadiscursive) is not created by these features but is expressed through them and this means that it may also reveal itself through a different configuration of features. Kluszczyński refers also to Peter Gidal: *In a structural/materialist film intrafilm relations (not intraframe), material relations: spectator-film and relations of the film structure are primary in relation to any narrative content. The basic aim of a structural/materialistic film is (...) to explain and analyse the process of production of a given image in every specific moment* <sup>15</sup>.

Watching the film by the Themersons today it is impossible not to notice that in a way it encourages the spectator to interact, making him/her abandon his/her receptive habits connected with traditional methods of film projection. The collage nature of the work (combination of animation, feature film and a well thought out and composed film form) do not exhaust, as it appears, its innovative character which in the first place is a continuation of the experiments of the film avant-garde from the 1920s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and secondly it is a precursor of future experimental cinema.

In the case of the film by Themersons and the incredible possibilities of perception it creates, it seems impossible to separate the form from the content without analysing in all the possible contexts their mutual impact. Themersons' gesture leads us also towards literary studies, especially "liberature", which makes us read the content and message of the work also through the specific form of the book. *Liberature is a type of literature in which the text and the material form of the book create an organic whole, and all elements, also the non-verbal, may be the carriers of meaning. Thus in a liberary work it is not only the verbal layer that is meaningful but also the physical space and construction of a book, its shape, format, typographical setting. The size, font and the colour of letters as well as the empty space of the page, drawing or a photo integrated with the text, finally type of paper or another material might all be significant. Not without meaning are all the numerical values: the size of the volume or number of pages, words or even particular characters. The reader deals with a total work which may assume any form (in accordance with the second meaning of the Latin "liber") what in practice means sometimes radical abandoning of traditional construction of a book. It is at the same time a truly original work, controlled by the writer at every stage of its creation* <sup>16</sup>.

Katarzyna Bazarnik and Zenon Fajfer, researchers of liberature, as its model example consider – due to the advanced or even total organisation of the text, changing also into control over the image of the book – *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce <sup>17</sup>. The readers' attention is raised not only by the language saturated with neologisms but also by the image of the text itself: hundred-letter words, abundance of footnotes, drawings and remarks on the margins of Chapter 2 of Book II. Especially significant is the lack of conventionally understood beginning and end (the end of the text refers us to its beginning) which is generally treated –

according to Bazarnik and Fajfer – as an emblem of the circular and cyclical structure of the work.

This formal wealth and precisely thought out structure are present also in the work by Themersons even though you cannot compare the short film with the book written over 17 years. It seems however that between these works a spiritual affinity can be found. Maybe the key to its understanding is precisely the structure of the film (the end that becomes the new beginning) extending its projection into the eternity. The projection leads us from the beginning to the end but also from the end to the beginning. Thus the reception of the film has a perpendicular character expressed in the formula: AB BA AB BA, etc. The eternally repeating movement gives the film a structural circularity rooted in the repetition itself: even though every event comes back in it an infinite number of times, in the first place the time of perception of the film as a result of continued repetition and cyclical nature of events assumes the form of a circle.

Katarzyna Bazarnik, when analysing the structure of *Finnegans Wake* points to its peculiar character. Let us remind the reader that the novel by Joyce starts with a sentence starting with a small letter and ends in a half sentence<sup>18</sup>. The researcher highlights in the first place the inseparable bond between the content and form<sup>19</sup>. In Joyce's text she finds a structure that in a precise way corresponds to the structure of the globe. The first sentence is not only the beginning of a book but also the continuation of the last sentence. This way the beginning and end are permanently connected pointing to the circular character of the novel (in this case also the book's cover and title pages become significant even before we start reading its proper content).

The reference to the figure of the globe, or rather a model of Earth, that is the geographical net, can also be found on individual pages of the book (also the number of pages counts): *This circularity or rather space-time character of the structure is represented in the precisely calculated number of pages of "Finnegans Wake", since 628 does not seem an accidental number (we obtain it from the formula for the perimeter of a circle  $2\pi r$  after replacing its radius with 100 – a significant number in the book). Thanks to this the total organisation of the text, going even into control over the book as an object itself, aiming at the creative omnipotence author could base his work not on a flat projection of a city – as in "Ulysses" – but on a spatial model of the globe with coordinates of the poles or the equator mathematically calculable on the surface of the volume. These almost unprecedented efforts of the author to control the size of the volume in the work of such a size were reflected in the editor's work. Apart from one edition, which would have to be considered faulty precisely due to the disturbed space of the volume (even though from the literary point of view everything is correct) "Finnegans Wake" is always reissued in the same typographical arrangement and with identical number of pages – i.e. 628<sup>20</sup>.*

According to Joyce, the book *Finnegans Wake* was to contain everything; in its precise structure you cannot separate the form from the content, since one factor in a direct way conditions the other. As Samuel Beckett wrote in his famous essay on Joyce: *Here form is content, content is form. (...) His writing is not about something; it is that something itself*<sup>21</sup>.

Without going deeper into Bazarnik's analysis of Joyce's text, it has to be pointed out that the author left in his novel hints which allow us to read the circular character

of the work (e.g. placing on appropriate pages of the book references to geographical names, of course appropriately distorted, or words taken from languages of different countries located in the book in places corresponding to the geographical location of these countries) in order to enable us to treat *Finnegans Wake* as a work that has “the entire world” inside. Bazarnik underlines the difficulties Joyce’s book caused to subsequent researchers. The very determination that it is a novel seems problematic since it is difficult to separate in it both specific “protagonists” as well as “events” that they apparently participate in<sup>22</sup>. This circularity of the structure constitutes an attempt to render four dimensions in the literary work: one of them is time (both the time of creation of the work and the time of its perception). At the same time the perpendicular “movement” of the projection of the film by the Themersons leads to temporary annihilation of the present time (with – let us recall – linear construction of its narrative), since thanks to the repetition every event has a cyclical character which leads us to understand time as a circle.

The film by the Themersons, especially from the contemporary point of view, can be easily treated as avant-garde, experimental cinema; right after its creation it was rejected by the audience. On the one hand it has a certain linear narrative, on the other it is difficult to treat it literally, to give time and place of the plot, since it is made impossible by the experimental form of the film and scarce information on the protagonist. From the very beginning we are in a way forced to treat the entire story about the adventure of a good citizen in a metaphorical or symbolic way. Of course in the film it is a bit different than in a novel because we can see the protagonist on the screen and we can observe the events in which he participates even if we cannot fully understand them. The end of the Themersons’ film becomes at the same time its new beginning and this resembles the structure of the book by Joyce. But there are more similarities.

Bazarnik also writes about the fact that the world from Joyce’s book is a land of echoes, reflection of reality, and events repeat themselves distorted by multiple reflections. The author underlines also that paradoxically we start reading Joyce’s book from its end, only to come back to its beginning at the end of the book. Vagueness of the narrative was, however, set in very specific, geometrical structures. Well, it seems that the Themersons did a similar thing leaving in their film – seen in the traditional way – hints which allow the spectator to reach its backwards reading. We can see them right from the beginning of the film.

Samuel Beckett points to Joyce’s inspiration with the views of Giordano Bruno through the philosophy of Giambattista Vico. In this case it is worth emphasising the rule of coincidence of opposites referred to by Beckett, which can be another key to reading the Themersons’ film. Beckett writes: *There is no difference, says Bruno, between the smallest possible chord and the smallest possible arc, no difference between the infinite circle and the straight line. The maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent. Minimal heat equals minimal cold. Consequently transmutations are circular. The principle (minimum) of one contrary takes its movement from the principle (maximum) of another. Therefore not only do the minima coincide with the minima, the maxima with the maxima, but the minima with the maxima in the succession of transmutations. Maximal speed is a state of rest. The maximum of corruption and the minimum of generation are identical: in principle, corruption is generation*<sup>23</sup>. Krzysztof Loska notices that



the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*) was taken by Joyce not only from Giordano Bruno but also from the philosophy of Nicholas of Kues<sup>24</sup>.

How can we trace this philosophy in the short film by Themersons? Discovery of this “double” projection of the film means that we cannot look at it anymore only in the traditional way. Every situation presented in the film will be at the same time its own negation; it will be simultaneously the obverse and the reverse of the same situation. We see the journey of the good citizen to the forest aware of the fact that at the end of the backwards projection he will inevitably come back to his desk. The crowd protesting against walking backwards will start walking backwards when the appropriate moment comes. As Beckett wrote, opposites cancel each other out, the minimum and maximum become the same.

This land of echoes that Bazarnik wrote about is also the space of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*. From the very beginning this double nature, pointing both to the self-reference character of the work, is suggested by the authors of the film. So, if we assume that the narrative in classic cinema develops in a linear way, then equal presentation of right and left signals the unusual symmetry of the work’s construction. Every direction is possible, none is privileged. What is more, when we already know that the film can be seen backwards and also backwards in a mirror reflection, then we do not know which frames in the film belong to the traditional projection and which were created as a result of moving the tape backwards. When the protagonist walks backwards, is he moving back? And maybe the authors of the film moved the film tape backwards in order to achieve this effect of movement? These questions remain unanswered and the situation seen on the screen remains without ontological explicitness. Similarly as in the case of *Finnegans Wake* when watching the film inevitably we go back to its beginning.

The film by the Themersons seen backwards becomes a kind of a film palindrome. The sense of this unusual work manifests itself both in the traditional and reverse projection. The concept of a palindrome from the perspective of the already closed work of the Themersons seems to fit ideally the later works by Stefan, especially his interest in semantic poetry and may correspond to the symmetry often present in the drawings by Franciszka<sup>25</sup>.

Since we are analysing the palindrome nature of the film by the Themersons it is worth focusing on two sentences that are spoken in the film. The sentence: *Ladies and gentlemen you have to know the metaphor read backwards* does not change its meaning in any significant way. The situation is different in the case of the first sentence that the protagonist hears in the receiver: *There will be no hole in the sky, even if you walk backwards*. Read backwards (with small deviations that will allow us to maintain its sense) sounds: *You will walk backwards even if there is no hole in the sky*. How can we interpret it? In the first place it may mean the imperative of non-conformism. Secondly, walking backwards may be in this case also read as the inevitability of the avant-garde, that is such understanding of the role of art according to which it constitutes the “advance guard” continuously exceeding the borders and setting new paths and horizons for thinking.

It is also worth pointing out that in *The Adventure of a Good Citizen* the Themersons often use the technique of shot/countershot; it appears in fact at the very beginning. What is interesting, the countershot in the case of this film would mean showing the same figure in the frame<sup>26</sup> but seen from two sides: right and left. In

this way in the first place the protagonist is presented but also the leader of the demonstration or the worker who lifts the wardrobe. The application of the shot/countershot technique allows the spectator to see precisely the same scenes (the only difference is in their beginning, “the first” frame – from right or left side) both in the case of the traditional and backwards projection.

Let us think how we could name this specific construction of the film by the Themersons? The term *film palindrome* does not fully render the features of this construction – the palindrome means a word, sentence or phrase which read both normally and backwards has the same meaning. If we refer to the Greek etymology it appears that the word “palindrome” is a combination of two words: *palin* (return) and *dromos* (path). So how do we call the work read backwards? In linguistics we find names such as “mirror sentences” or “crabs”. It seems however that equally appropriate name in this case might be *anonym*, even though according to the dictionary definition it is a term that refers only to a pseudonym created from a name read backwards<sup>27</sup>. Maybe the same name may be awarded to a sentence or statement read backwards which in this way changes its sense. Or from one more perspective: a word read backwards will constitute a specific type of an anagram.

Maybe we could look at the film by Themersons from yet another point of view, coming back to literature again. It is worth remembering the existence of portmanteau words invented and brought to life by Lewis Carroll in 19<sup>th</sup> century in the books about the adventures of Alice. At present this trick in linguistics is called contamination. According to Maciej Słomczyński, the translator of both Joyce and Carroll into Polish, it is a method also used willingly by James Joyce when writing *Finnegans Wake*. In the preface to the adventures of Alice, that is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, Słomczyński writes: *For children “Alice” is a story full of incredible adventures, surprising protagonists, funny poems and sudden changes of action, completely understandable and allowed in the realms of fairytales. For adults “Alice” is a second, next to “Finnegans Wake” by Joyce, masterpiece whose main theme is the analysis of human mind deep in a dream. And just as the language of “Finnegans Wake,” the language of “Alice” is governed by the grammar and rhythm of a ream: intertwining, slowing down, repetition, sudden changes of pace, monotony and succeeding it torn pieces of vision: all this refers to the same extent to the structure of the plot and language. (...) In the realm of language a classical example of a dream montage are today famous portmanteau words from the poem “Jabberwocky” whose meaning is explained to Alice by Humpty-Dumpty. (...) The matter is seemingly very simple: halves of different words connected with each other create a third word which immediately starts to live an autonomous, full – even though previously unknown – life. This merging, permeating and mixing of pieces of a real world Carroll considered the basic right of a dream*<sup>28</sup>.

This merging of different fragments into one whole takes place in the film by the Themersons with the use of the mirror which releases the poetic potential of reality: half-clerk, half-mirror reflection becomes a completely new creation; the hand of a good citizen and its reflection in the mirror unexpectedly transform on the screen into a bird. If we look in the same way at the entire structure of *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, it will appear that the film itself becomes precisely a portmanteau film. Its two ideally symmetrical (the same but not the same)



*The Adventure of a Good Citizen*, dir. Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (1937)

parts create a completely new quality which – as Słomczyński wrote – starts to live an autonomous life<sup>29</sup>.

At this point it is worth coming back once more to the logic of a dream to which both Słomczyński and Loska point in the case of *Finnegans Wake*. The latter, referring to the four crucial elements of a dream according to Freud<sup>30</sup> writes about their use by Joyce in the structure of the novel, for example, precisely in the form of portmanteau words (density), related to a certain excess or abundance of associations, as in the form of coincidence of opposites (means of expressions of a dream). In the logic of a dream the category of opposites and contradiction is rejected; similarly as in the film by the Themersons<sup>31</sup>.

All trick shots and carefully composed, symmetrical frames which in the classic reception of the film seem to be simply playful decorations, during the second projection open us onto a completely different level. The film is black and white<sup>32</sup>; already in the first scene right after the frame with drumsticks hitting the bowler hat, in the frame divided in two the inscriptions “right” and “left” appear. As we know, we can interpret them not only as a formal trick but also as referring to the general message of the work: it is at the same time the positive and negative of what we see on screen. The negative of the film tape appears also in the animated, poetic scene in the forest when on the screen we see not only forest animals but in a way also their shadows<sup>33</sup>. Once we discover that the film can be watched both ways and that it is a justified trick, this principle of contrast between the negative-positive appears to refer to the structure of the entire film; every frame seen on screen is simultaneously its negative and positive. Every situation presented on screen is at the same time its own negation; the black and white story additionally underlines this dimension of the film and the film’s logic seems to correspond to the logic of a dream<sup>34</sup>.

Finally we should remember that the films from the period of the so-called Second Film Avant-Garde often referred, not only through names, but in the first place through their structure to musical compositions; it is sufficient to recall *Ballet mé-*

*canique* (1924) by Fernand Léger or *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt* (Berlin, *Symphony of a Great City*, 1927) by Walter Ruttmann. Themersons in the films *Drobiazg melodyjny* (*Musical moment*), *Zwarcie* (*Short circuit*) or *Oko i Ucho* (*The eye and the ear*), also tried – according to Kluszczyński – to constitute a formal correspondence between a musical work and the picture layer of a film<sup>35</sup>. Deliberations on synaesthesia in cinema are however too vast a topic to go into details in this text. It is worth emphasising that if we look at *The Adventure...* from this perspective, it seems that we can read it in the categories of a musical palindrome, where the formal arrangement of images seen from a symmetrical perspective of its obverse and reverse creates one, precisely composed whole<sup>36</sup>.

This modest, not even 10-minute-long film by the Themersons, thanks to its wealth allows us for a moment – just like the work by Joyce – to look towards the infinity. Paraphrasing Ludwig Wittgenstein: since the limits of my language are the limits of the world, then expansion of the limits of the language – in this case a film one – is at the same time the expansion of the limits of our world. At the end once again the words of Federman: *As such, fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or an imitation, or even a recreation of reality; it can only be a reality – an autonomous reality whose only relation to the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth*<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Copy of the film was found after the war and sent to the Central Film Archive in Warsaw. See extra to the DVD *Filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów: “Przygoda człowieka poczciwego”, “Wzywamy pana Smitha”, “Oko i Ucho”*, Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski, LUX, Warszawa 2008, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> A. Prodeus, *Themersonowie. Szkice biograficzne*, Warszawa 2009, p. 73. I believe that it will be possible to organise a public screening of this film which will reveal all the possibilities this outstanding work offers to the recipients.

<sup>4</sup> Neither Marcin Giżycki in his book *Awangarda wobec kina. Film w kręgu polskiej awangardy artystycznej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* (Warszawa 1996), nor Ryszard Kluszczyński in the publication *Obrazy na wolności. Studia z historii sztuk medialnych w Polsce* (Warszawa 1998), nor Łukasz Ronduda in the text *Ocalale filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów, “Ha!art”* 2007, no. 26 (part of this issue – *Literackie intermedia – twórczość Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów* – was dedicated to the work of the two artists) write about it. Also I, analysing the film in the text *Surfikcja “Przygody człowieka poczciwego” Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów* (“Kwartalnik Filmowy”

2007, no. 57-58, pp. 14-22), omit this unusual aspect of the film.

<sup>5</sup> Giżycki does not take into consideration the lost film *Europa* created by the Themersons in 1931-1932. An idea of the formal wealth of this film can be surely found in *Europa II* made by Piotr Zarębski in 1988. See. L. Koszkało, *Europy (nie)tożsame*, “Ha!art” 2007, no. 26, pp. 28-31.

<sup>6</sup> M. Giżycki, *Kino niezależne Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów*, in: *Awangarda wobec kina...* op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> An ordinary wardrobe placed in a new context becomes in this case an artistic artefact. Action of the Themersons brings to mind the famous gesture of Marcel Duchamp who made a urinal a work of art, anticipating the actions by Andy Warhol (Campbell soup tin).

<sup>8</sup> And maybe during such a backwards projection *The Adventure...* even more clearly reveals its affinity with the European Film Avant-Garde. Namely the Dadaist *Entr'acte* by René Clair of 1924.

<sup>9</sup> See A. Taszycka, op. cit. and R. Federman, *Surfiction: Fiction now... and Tomorrow*, Swallow Press, Chicago 1981.

<sup>10</sup> Maybe this way the film by the Themersons formally is also getting close to the Moebius strip.

- <sup>11</sup> G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, A Dutton Paperback, New York 1970, p. 41; quote after: M. Giżycki, *Kino rozszerzone po trzydziestu latach*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2001, no. 35-36, p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81.
- <sup>13</sup> See R. W. Kluszczyński, *Film – wideo – multimedia*, Kraków 2002, p. 52.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.liberatura.pl/co-to-jest-liberatura.html> (definition published on the website of Małopolski Instytut Kultury which has a literature reading room) (accessed on: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>17</sup> K. Bazarnik, Z. Fajfer, *Historia literatury*, text available at the website: <http://www.liberatura.pl/17591939-czyli-od-tristrama-do-finnegana.html> (accessed on: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>18</sup> First sentence of *Finnegans Wake* is: *riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs*. While the last word written in the book is "the" (without a dot and this sends us back to the first page of Joyce's work).
- <sup>19</sup> K. Bazarnik, *Globalne spojrzenie na "Finnegans Wake"*, in: *Wokół Jamesa Joyce'a*, ed. K. Bazarnik, F. Fordham, Kraków 1998. Bazarnik emphasises that the problems with translation of *Finnegans Wake* result also from the fact that the novel after translation would also have to resemble the structure of the original book, that is, for example end at page 628.
- <sup>20</sup> <http://www.liberatura.pl/1759-1939-czyli-od-tristrama-do-finnegana.html> (accessed: 26.06.2010).
- <sup>21</sup> S. Beckett, *Dante... Bruno. Vico. Joyce*, in: *idem, Our Examination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress*, Faber and Faber, London 1972, p. 14.
- <sup>22</sup> K. Bazarnik, *Globalne spojrzenie...* op. cit., p. 143-145.
- <sup>23</sup> S. Beckett, op. cit., p. 7.
- <sup>24</sup> K. Loska, "Finnegans Wake" *Jamesa Joyce'a. Rozumienie i interpretacja*, Kraków 2000, p. 30 and 76.
- <sup>25</sup> Apart from the symmetry in the drawings by Franciszka Themerson we can also find a play with "obverse" and "reverse" of the same picture; examples can be found among postcards published by Gaberbocchus Press.
- <sup>26</sup> Usually the counterplane technique is used when filming dialogues.
- <sup>27</sup> An interesting discussion may be found on the website [www.palindromy.pl](http://www.palindromy.pl), hosted by Prof. Tadeusz Morawski, Polish expert on palindromes (see: [http://www.palindromy.pl/pal\\_raki.php](http://www.palindromy.pl/pal_raki.php)). I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Morawski and linguist Ewelina Grzeżkiewicz for consultation.
- <sup>28</sup> M. Słomczyński, *Od tłumacza*, in: L. Carroll, *Przygody Alicji w Krainie Czarów i O tym, co Alicja odkryła po drugiej stronie lustra*, transl. M. Słomczyński, Wrocław 1990, p. 5-6. We have to add that there are quite a number of films which try to render the state of a human mind while asleep; it is enough to recall the pioneer in this area *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) by Luis Buñuel, another work from the times of Great Avant-garde.
- <sup>29</sup> And maybe the good citizen sitting on the roof is a distant reflection of Humpty Dumpty from the book *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. If in Carroll's book the conversation was a kind of game in this case the film itself is the game.
- <sup>30</sup> These are subsequently: 1. densification/condensation, 2. displacement, 3. means of expression of a dream, 4. secondary elaboration. Quoted after: K. Loska, "Finnegans Wake"... op. cit., pp. 109-110.
- <sup>31</sup> It seems that once again the affinity between Themersons and surrealism is confirmed even though Stefan Themerson himself rather renounced it.
- <sup>32</sup> Allegedly in the original version the lyrical sequence in the forest was hand-coloured. See extra to the DVD *Filmy Franciszki i Stefana Themersonów...*, op. cit., p. 70.
- <sup>33</sup> The Themersons probably used in it photographs which were created on a specially designed by Stefan table for animation on which the camera was placed under a glass top lit from all sides by artificial light. (Detailed description of the table can be found in: S. Themerson, *O potrzebie tworzenia widzeń*, Warszawa 2008, p. 60).
- <sup>34</sup> Similar narrative experiments in the cinema, apart from the previously mentioned experiments by the structuralistic and expanded cinema, arouse interest of American cinema on the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, several dozen years after the film by the Themersons. I am thinking about two films which in a specific way experiment with the film narrative: *Palindromes* by Tod Solondz (2004) and *Memento* (2000) by Christopher Nolan.
- <sup>35</sup> R. Kluszczyński, *Obrazy na wolności. Studia z historii sztuk medialnych w Polsce*, Warszawa 1998, p. 55.
- <sup>36</sup> Music for the film was composed by Stefan Kisielewski.
- <sup>37</sup> R. Federman, op. cit., p. 8.