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## **A Crypto-Theological Vision of the World in the “Ga-ga: Glory to the Heroes” by Piotr Szulkin in the Light of Visual Theology**

**Kryptoteologiczna wizja świata  
w filmie „Ga-ga. Chwała bohaterom”  
Piotra Szulkina w świetle teologii wizualnej**

### **ABSTRACT:**

The article contains a theological movie analysis of the work of Piotr Szulkin, the “Ga-ga: Glory to the Heroes”. Its aim is to extract a cryptotheological vision of the world contained in this movie, by compiling it with Christian theology, understood as the defined concept of the world. An important point of reference will be the postsecular thought, which sees the hidden choice of theological nature in even the most secularized way of thinking. At the outset, an understanding of the terms of “theology” and “cryptotheology” will be presented.

Then, there will be an analysis of time and spaces in the movie. An application to analyze the movie concept of the performance of G. Debord will be a crucial aspect of the undertaken considerations. In the conclusion, there will be an analysis of the concept of sacrifice, which is fundamental to the subject, included in the movie and referenced in the concept of R. Girard.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Szulkin, movie, postsecularism, cryptotheology, sacrifice, Debord, Girard

### **STRESZCZENIE:**

W artykule dokonana zostaje teologiczno-filmowa analiza dzieła „Ga-ga. Chwała bohaterom” Piotra Szulkina. Jej celem jest wydobyć kryptoteologiczną wizję świata zawartą w tym filmie przez zestawienie jej z teologią chrześcijańską rozumianą jako określona koncepcja świata. Ważnym punktem odniesienia będzie myśl postsekularna, która u podstaw każdego nawet najbardziej zsekularyzowanego sposobu myślenia dostrzega ukryty wybór natury teologicznej. Na wstępie przedstawione zostanie rozumienie pojęcia „teologia” oraz „kryptoteologia”. Następnie dokonana zostanie analiza czasu i przestrzeni przedstawionych w filmie. Istotnym aspektem podjętych rozważań będzie aplikacja do analizy filmu koncepcji spektaklu G. Deborda. W podsumowaniu przeanalizowana zostanie fundamentalna dla podejmowanego tematu koncepcja ofiary zawarta w filmie i odniesiona do koncepcji R. Girarda.

### **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:**

Szulkin, film, postsekularyzm, kryptoteologia, ofiara, Debord, Girard

In this article, a theological and film studies perspective of Piotr Szulkin's "Ga ga: Glory to the heroes" is analyzed.<sup>1</sup> The analysis is to unveil the specific crypto-theological vision of the world presented in the film by comparing it with Christian theology understood as a specific conception of the world. In his film, Piotr Szulkin performed a deep criticism of his contemporary society showing that it is deprived of anything sacred, rules and truths which could be the beacon for human life. Consequently, it has become a "lay hell" where life is devoid of any sense or direction. What is left is only flickering moving pictures locking up people in a fake reality.

### **THEOLOGY: A DEEPER ORDER**

To begin with, one should stress that the word "theology" is used here in two senses: broader and narrower. The broader sense of theology refers to its European, Greek beginnings, whereas the narrower one indicates the Christian theology – the division into the Western and Eastern traditions and the rise of new denominations following the Reformation is irrelevant for the analyses, since despite greater disparities in different types of Christianity, they seem to be fundamentally compatible in their visions of God, the world and human, which when analyzing "Ga-ga: Glory to the Heroes" seems to be of special importance. The theology in the broader sense is to mean the way of thinking based on a conviction that the world is in order – not in chaos. Human life is different from the lives of other creatures; human life is directed to the transcendent; there is an unchanging, fundamental rule that it is governed by. In *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* by Werner Jaeger, the author argues that theology is "a specific creation of the Greek mind".<sup>2</sup> "The god became an issue for Greeks", says Jaeger, noting that one should understand the notion of "God" or "deity" not in the Christian, but the Greek sense – as a primeval, perfect rule that embraces and directs everything.<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that the early Greek philosophers "treat the presence of God in the world as something direct and absolutely sure"<sup>4</sup>, which makes

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<sup>1</sup> „Ga-ga. Chwała bohaterom”, directed by: Piotr Szulkin, 1985, 84 mins.

<sup>2</sup> W. Jaeger, *Teologia wczesnych filozofów greckich*, trans. Jerzy Wocial, Kraków 2007, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

them uninterested in the evidence for its existence; Instead, they are engrossed in its form and properties.

The new version of the theological thinking is referred to as post-secularism, which finds a hidden theological choice even in the most secularized way of thinking. Agata Bielik-Robson proposes the notion of “cryptotheology” as a religious option that unfolds in the modernity in which the institutionalized forms of religions have already disintegrated, with the dogma in the first place, and yet it has not lead to an atrophy of faith but – in line with the thought of Charles Taylor – creation of new conditions for harboring religious beliefs.<sup>5</sup> The fundamental experience that – according to Bielik-Robson – makes a human unable to ignore the eschatological perspective is the awareness of death described by her as “non-unrootable negativity”, human’s continuous condition of being unfit for the reality, slow dying in a course of “incremental deaths”. Christian theology combined this state of being unfit for the reality with the implications of the original sin which affects all people and remains a secret and painful “stain” on human existence. Drawing on this experience of negativity, cryptotheology stresses that it is the source of the need for seeking the meaning, i.e. “an image of life that is other than the one that is accessible (...) through the direct experience: an augmented, increased life that would be the real one, a life free from doubts which very much here and now are springing up in the context of the relentless and undeniable presence of death.”<sup>6</sup> This fundamental negativity can be either deepen or leveled, which makes a definitive limes between different philosophies. Some of them will treat his human negativity as a new principle of life, that is a “way out” into the transcendent – “exit” from the world or “a way out” into the immanent, to which the way is paved with “a liberated imagination”, others will black out the “scandal of negativity” in favor of a utopian affirmation of fate. The vision of the world by Piotr Szulkin can definitely be placed as an escape to the “immanent” (a particular concave image of traditional transcendent ) through imagination.<sup>7</sup>

Before going on to a thorough analysis of the theology and cryptotheology of Szulkin’s “Ga-ga. Glory to the Heroes”, we should make a short pause to elaborate on the meaning of visual theology and the way it analyzes the movie picture in the

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<sup>5</sup> A. Bielik-Robson, *Myśl postsekalarna, czyli teologia pod stołem*, in: „Idee” 17 (113) 2008. <http://artpapier.com/index.php?page=artykul&wydanie=66&artykul=1543>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

attempt to reach its theological meaning. This attempt will be underpinned with an idea of Witold Kawecki who dedicated a lot attention to the role of image in theology, stressing that nowadays, in the times of the pictorial turn, it is a natural way of exploring theology.

First of all, visual theology differs from the theology of image since it does not focus on the object to be seen, but on the one who looks at it. It analyses the conditions of seeing and learning by means of the eyesight, and on so called "scopic regime", i.e. a relationship between seeing and knowing.<sup>8</sup> The "visual" in "visual theology" means the way of looking (the way we see and thanks to what we see the things that we can see) and it mainly refers to the way of designing the image to be seen. It should then be understood anthropomorphically – people live by images and through them, they can understand the world.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, visual theology and the theology based on word function in different ways – each of them has its own language, meanings, structures of comprehension, etc., but they build a complementary image of the attempt to capture the transcendent and immanent nature of God, since both approaches are contained in one theology.<sup>10</sup>

According to visual theology the image has its own "language" which consists of a variety of codes, symbols, meanings, narratives, etc., through whose lens it has to be analyzed. Image, in the first place, highlights the bodily dimension of man, which often seems to be forgotten about in verbal discussions. Image requires a specific personal commitment to reading it. Greater focus on image could contribute to a renewal of the language of theology, paying more attention to details, fate of an individual, a point which the image tends to be all about. When analyzing a movie one needs to combine the competences of a theologian and a film critic, meaning the sensitivity to different film styles and narratives, the knowledge of the film cultural context and also the ability to identify some specific theological potential in the film. Theologian-critic's work could be compared to an Old Testament prophet who had to read the signs of his times, tell apart the genuine ones from the false ones, the voice of God from the voice of "idols", and accept the

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<sup>8</sup> W. Kawecki, *Zobaczyć wiarę, Studium obrazu postrzeganego jako komunikacja wiary perspektywy teologii kultury i teologii mediów*, Kraków, 2013, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> H. Belting, *Antropologia obrazu. Szkice do nauki o obrazie*, tłum. M. Bryl, Kraków 20017, p. 12-13.

<sup>10</sup> R. Reynoso, *Expanding Theology: An Argument for Visual Theology*, p. 20-21. [https://www.academia.edu/5943556/Expanding\\_Theology\\_An\\_Argument\\_for\\_Visual\\_Theology](https://www.academia.edu/5943556/Expanding_Theology_An_Argument_for_Visual_Theology)

challenge of the need to justify one's own calling and proving that it was his voice that was the genuine one. Another difficulty is the need to navigate across different disciplines of humanities which serve necessary help in theological analysis of films. A theologian-critic should be familiar with the fundamental discourses of modernity and able to assess them, identifying their contexts, since only this can ensure full appreciation of a film, being to a large extent a product of the main ideas of its time. Finally, they will also be able to discern if "God speaks to human" through the film.<sup>11</sup>

Following the description of the different ways of understanding the scope of theology and defining the status of the visual theology, we can proceed to a detailed analysis of Piotr Szulkin's film image to explore it for theological and cryptotheological tropes.

### **CHAOS AS A „PRINCIPLE”**

"Ga-ga. Glory to the Heroes", the last part of a film tetralogy, like Szulkin's earlier films, is not a science-fiction production. They have been mistakenly believed to belong to this genre because of their props and where they are set. In fact, this is an outstandingly original cinema, through which the director presents his vision of human and the civilization. In "Ga-ga. Glory to the Heroes", Szulkin uses the code of grotesque to pose the most fundamental questions concerning humankind and the shape of human civilization.

The main character, Scope (performed by Daniel Olbrychski) is a perpetrator who under a governmental program for criminals is sentenced to be sent an unknown planet in order to colonize it. He gets to the planet called Australia 458, where he is recognized as a hero sent over to accomplish a special mission. He is supposed to commit a great crime for which he is going to be severely punished by being impaled, which is to be broadcast as a significant annual media event. This science-fiction and grotesque convention harbors a rich content of anthropological and theological nature, which should be explained analyzing the visual layer of the film since it seems to be the most significant message of Szulkin's work.

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<sup>11</sup> M. Marczak, *Kulturowe kompetencje Kościoła w zakresie sztuk wizualnych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem filmu*, in: *Sztuka polska a Kościół dzisiaj. Analiza sztuki sakralnej w perspektywie Jubileuszu 1050. Rocznicy Chrztu Polski*, Warszawa 2016, p. 149.

Almost every Christian theology, which has had the ambition of holistic description of reality, can be brought down and described by a God-human-world triada. Obviously, the stresses on its particular components might differ: some conceptions focus more on God (St. Augustin), others on human (Karl Rahner) and others still on the created world (St. Hildegard of Bingen). With all this, there is no antagonistic relationship between any of these realities – it is rather about focusing on certain aspects. The medieval image below shows the Creator who with a compass, i.e. mathematics, exact principles and proportions is working on the creation of the world.<sup>12</sup>



In the following considerations, the roles of the created world, human and God in the Szulkin's film are to be discussed. Obviously, these questions are not explicitly stated in the film but the fact that one can find them implies that theological thinking is a universal way of describing the world and human, reaches the

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<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European\\_science\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_Ages#/media/File:God\\_the\\_Geometer.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_science_in_the_Middle_Ages#/media/File:God_the_Geometer.jpg)

deepest recesses of human soul, a tool for describing human existence by means of notions inaccessible for philosophy or anthropology. What is the visual theology that one can find in “Ga-ga. Glory to the Heroes”?

The created world meaning nature is totally absent from the Szulkin’s vision. Nature is nothing critical for understanding humans and their lives which are lived in an urban reality, artificial spaces created by humans, forbidding any vital manifestation of life by means of showing the grandeur of mountains, the element of river or the power of the Sun. In the world that Szulkin shows us, nature has been entirely restrained, reduced to the role of an insignificant backdrop for human stories.



Human life intertwined in harmonious laws of nature in the vision of St. Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>13</sup>

The space in which Szulkin’s characters exist – since it is difficult to say that they truly live – is degenerated, dark, ugly, murky and off-putting. The overwhelming ugliness, kitschiness and shoddiness of the visible world makes its ontological status seem to be transient, fleeting, phantasmagoric. Scratched walls, omnipresent litters, dreary corridors, dirty toilet seats make so great an excess of ugliness

<sup>13</sup> <http://lechbukowski.blog.onet.pl/2008/05/24/hildegarda-z-bingen/>

that it calls for asking questions about its deeper meaning. Scope lives in a room that is in so poor a condition that an observer has a feeling that it is an unrealistic concentration of things in forms that commonly put people off. A dwarf sitting on a dirty toilet bowl, a broken out pink toilet seat, all of this just next to the bed seem to be a great representation of this concentration.



The space outside, not presented all too often in the film, does not look any better, either. What one can see is usually obscured by darkness brighten up by colorful neons inviting passers-by to step in, promising something more than what is offered outside but this also turns out to be a trap. The inside of the bar is as ugly as the outside, the only difference being that it is meant do make an impression of being something exclusive, better. However, it is only an appearance that deepening the sense of alienation from the space. The picture of the world leaves an observer without any doubt that we have to do with a degenerated world, deprived not only of any form of beauty but also – meaning. This world is neither based on anything, nor meant to mean anything. It exists by the power of its ugliness and chaos, being a kind of devilish anti-order, washed out of any traces anything holy.

Let us now take a look at the society that lives on the planet Australia 458, being in Szulkin's film an image of Earth seen by the director. Like the Medieval mystic St. Hildegard of Bingen had a gift of seeing the oneness and harmony of the world where everything is a beautiful and planned *opus Dei*, Szulkin shows a picture of a delusional earthly civilization where violence, stupidity, lawlessness and chaos rule and incapacitated human individuals live meaningless lives manipulated by massive media events, giving them a substitute of the real life.





The society on Australia 458 is futurologists' nightmares come true, a gloomy dystopia by means of which Szulkin tells us a lot of true things about the contemporary world. On this planet, people live dehumanized lives, incapacitated, they are a pulp society whose authorities by means of the media (mainly television) provide entertainment and artificial excitement to cater to their lowly instincts. After all, television is a permanent fact of life for the people of Australia 458.



This is a world in which everything has become entertainment for the public. People live in dark, dirty rooms, move around narrow, dark streets, eat meals of undefined consistency; they do not make any communities or bonds, they do not believe in any values or religion but they are convinced that they are living peaceful and comfortable lives.



The "heroes" who are intended to commit the crimes live in buildings which make a unique space. Outside it looks like any other building except the color and the colorful neon "Welcome Hero". Inside, however, one can see an excessive concentration of statues and sculptures – cheap copies and fakes whose role is to add to an aura of uniqueness to the entire place, whereas, in fact, they seem to be another sign of emptiness and chaos of the morbid civilization. What also attracts attention is the generously ornate walls and portals giving an air of an aristocratic splendor. In reality, this seems to be an unusual visual image of the fall of culture and humanity. The copies of sculptures and busts are meaningless artifacts whose function is difficult to define. They seem to be symbols of the ancient magnificence which today have been reduced to an insignificant prop.



## **A POSTMODERN GOLGOTHA**

In "Ga-ga. Glory to the Heroes", one can find implicit theological tropes which should be gathered now in one place to find the Szulkin's main message which without theological sensitivity could pass unnoticed.

A priest turns up already in the very first scene – he sees Scope to the place from which Scope is to fly to the unknown planet. The priest does not provide spiritual service in the sense his status could imply. He is an ordinary assistant, smirking and conceited, with a book of Criminal Code under his shoulder instead of the Bible. This short scene is tale-telling as for the condition of religion on Earth, from which Scope is about to depart. Religion has become a thing of tradition, to assist during important events, additional guardian of public order, which condemns those daring to commit criminal acts. Another grotesque scene with Scope and the priest is the one in which Scope is "crowned" by having a helmet



put on, which is to legitimize his mission in the unknown civilization at which he is bound to arrive.

Having arrived in Australia 458, Scope learns that he is to take part in some cruel ritual which has been looked forward to by everyone. After committing a great crime, he is destined to be impaled in public and the entire event will be broadcast on television. On a huge stadium, where he is to be executed, three pales have been erected. (In the stand there are big notes reading: "Ordnung muss sein" and "Dura lex, sed lex"). The pale on the right is for Scope, the left one for another "hero", who has also come to Australia 458 from the Earth, but what intrigues is the pale in the middle. It is waiting for someone very special, still missing and looked forward to. Awaited with a great hope and anticipation. The interpretation of this empty pale is to be conducted later, but one can see that we have to do with some grotesque transformation of a scene that is central for the western civilization – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Look 23:39-43). When Scope is looking at the attributes connected with his impalement, the references to the



crucifixion seem even stronger: there is (1) a bat to break tibia; (2) a plaque with a note to be fixed to the pale (prepared for the middle, absent convict); (3) a whip for whipping; (4) a syringe with an anesthetic ("In the past, we would use herbs to kill pain, but now it is obsolete", says one of the characters on Scope looking at the anesthetic).

When Scope visits the execution site, everyone is swarming there preparing everything for the media show. Various groups are practicing their choreographies, a band are playing, fireworks are going off, lights are being arranged, a reporter is forcefully demanding seeing the victim to be. An atmosphere of excitement and forthcoming celebrations is omnipresent. The last theological reference appears at the end of the film when Scope accompanied by his beloved escape from Australia 458, setting off to an inhabited planet to start a new civilization.

*... żyli długo i szczęśliwie  
dając początek nowej  
cywilizacji ...*

"...and having started a new civilization, they lived happily ever after..."

## **LIFE AS A SPECTACLE**

Before going on to an attempt of theological interpretation of Szulkin's film, first one should consider its anthropological layer, since it is perfectly in line with the concept of "society of the spectacle" by Guy Debord. According to Debord

a spectacle is a creation of the media technology which imposes on people a passive approach to reality. A true life becomes deprived of the element of reality, is replaced with an image. Among the attributes of the society of the spectacle one could list: holding the truth as relative, destruction of history, alienation, passiveness, gargantuan consumerism, all of which leads to a symbolic death of the society<sup>14</sup> – it is worth noting that this description fits well to this insightful film by Szulkin. “The spectacle appears to be a great positivity, unattainable and impossible to be challenged. The only thing it says is that what appears is good, and what is good – appears.”<sup>15</sup> The spectacle takes over individuals’ lives in their entirety. Genuine experience is replaced with media pseudo events. “In all its forms: news or propaganda, in advertisement or direct consumption of entertainment, the spectacle makes a model of life that prevails in the society.”<sup>16</sup>

The role of the spectacle in the society is very specific:

It is a reversal of the genuine life (“an autonomous movement of non-living”)

The spectacle is a common sense of isolation of isolated individuals

The spectacle transpires social life, functions as a space and mechanism of illusion

Instead of experiencing reality in its entirety, the spectacle only offers incomplete images

1. The spectacle is a materialized form of ideology which legitimizes further development of the society of the spectacle.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on Debord’s functions of the spectacle when analyzing Szulkin’s film, one should point out the following analogies:

2. The “real” life of the people of Australia 458 is focused on the media show whose role is to “cleanse” their lives elevating them, show “genuine” emotions; in fact, the spectacle distracts the people’s attention from their real problems, obscures their lives with a generic reality, i.e. Debord’s “non-living”.

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<sup>14</sup> G. Debord, *Spółeczeństwo spektaklu*, Gdańsk, p. 113–114.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> Tamże, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> A. Ogonowska, *Spółeczeństwo spektaklu: prekursorzy i ich współczesne dziedzictwo intelektualne*, w: „Przyszłość. Świat-Europa-Polska”, 2012, nr 1, p. 18.

3. Despite the excitement and excessive expression which are commonplace in Szulkin's world, in reality no one cares about other people, everyone goes about focused solely on their own business like the family, who want to use Scope to get money for purportedly blind daughter (to this end her mother wants her to "serve" some time in his bed).
4. In Szulkin's world, people live in a world of illusion being totally unaware of this: the spectacle has become perfection becoming the fundamental mechanism guiding and informing the society.
5. In Szulkin's vision, people cannot appreciate reality, look at it critically, quite on the contrary: they live on happy with the media images provided; focusing on details makes a great opportunity for manipulation which is "invisible" for the public.
6. Entire reality of Australia 458 is focused on continuous legitimization of the status quo, i.e. it is a regime which controls social life through the media; the annual festival of impaling criminals convicted for committing a great crime plays the central role in controlling the public; executing them in public is to "cleanse" the society and preserve the status quo ("It's edifying to see a crime be punished", says the investigator to Scope).

As it has been shown, the world depicted in Szulkin's film perfectly reflects Debord's model of the society of the spectacle, which is the closed anthropological and cultural backdrop for understanding the film, though it does not address the very essence of things, which calls for using the theological approach. While in the visual layer of the film, it is a perfect model of society of "individuals without properties", manipulated by television and popular mass events, there still remains a question of the causes of this state of affairs and possible counter measures which we could take. Now, it seems that we are due to address the symbolic nature of the empty space, at the middle pale and consider the causes of the social and cultural disaster depicted in Szulkin's film. Is his film a grotesque vision a society of the spectacle, deprived of God"?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> L. Gruszevska Blaim, *Dystopianising the Dystopian: Piotr Szulkin's Film Tetralogy*, in: *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, red. F. Vieira, Cambridge 2013, p. 206.

## THE EMPTY SPACE IN THE WESTERN CIVILIZATION

In Szulkin's film, references to God are not direct. That is why the God-human-world triada, which was to be a point of reference to spot theological traces in his film, must remain incomplete unless this absence (the empty place on the pale) is to be treated as a telling space, calling for the sacred, waiting for rescue. Showing the absence and emptiness as a sense is not a novelty in art, including the cinematic one. It suffices to say about the painful struggle with God, His being silent, and then the emptiness following His "death" in Ingmar Bergman's films. The closest literary point of reference to this meaningful emptiness is "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. Also there, the existence of both main characters who constantly ponder if it would not have been better if they had hanged themselves, is closely connected with waiting for Godot who is supposed to change their fates. However, he never comes. The protagonists are left to themselves, with an empty world, a life without meaning, a dead tree. The author of "Waiting for Godot" poses there the most fundamental metaphysical and religious questions, since the old answers have already been obsolete, the old world has crumbled down, and the human lives without shelter. The essence of the Beckett's drama was aptly addressed in the Nobel award ceremony speech: "Through literary devices he showed the misery and suffering of the modern human. This poetic piece hoists over the barren and devastated Earth resembling begging for mercy on the agonizing humankind, and the gloomy air of his writing – paradoxically – comforts the desperate and sets the repressed free."<sup>19</sup> The Beckett's drama reflects the painful self-awareness of the West – the author doubts the redeeming power of the Western civilization, does not believe that the human can attain happiness thanks to the works of their thought and hands.

The modern times, deprived of the sacred and the faith in the merciful God, proved an illusion of the idea of human individuality (guaranteed before by God who took care for each person), also the sense of the direction and meaning of human life has dissipated (which before was geared for the Kingdom of Heavens). This bitter self-awareness of the modern human encapsulated in the figments of their mind accompanied by a conviction that there is no way out, since history has again become a closed loop of time.

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<sup>19</sup> A. Libera, *Godot i jego cień*, Kraków 2009, p. 69.

The disappearance of bonds with the extrahistoric reality brought about a painful "fall" of human in history which is ruled with its merciless laws: power, authority, and money. Drawing on the thought of E. Voeglin it seems possible to say that "the loss of the bond with the transcendent leads to the creation of illusory reality, which unleashes demonic forces from the human encouraging wickedness and vile acts committed with no burden for their conscience."<sup>20</sup>

Szulkin's film does not leave any illusions – the humankind is committing a mass suicide (the scene of whales committing suicide, which Scope can see on TV in his room, is then symbolic). All the values have died: the society is controlled by television which requires bloody shows. The Earth has become an ugly planet. Szulkin really succeeded in showing this ugly side of life on Earth. The holy has been replaced with nothing, emptiness.

The director deems his films to be existential, saying: "(...) what is missing in all of my films is God, these are films about people abandoned by God." About his characters he adds: "(...) they would like to have some serious conversation, a punishment that would take away the sins of the world. It turns out that all this is impossible, everything is empty."<sup>21</sup> What is there left for the human to do? An escape from this world. In the film, there is the symbolic escape of Scope and his beloved. They choose an uninhabited planet to get as far as possible from human horrors. This is where one can finish the theological analysis of Szulkin's film, concluding that it shows the consequences of "getting rid of" God from public life, which resulted in a slow "demise" of man and culture, which has drowned in a media spectacle pulling down with itself any hope for change or rescue.

In Szulkin's film, there is one more crypto-theological concept, which should be highlighted for the full appreciation of the film. There is some hope and a hidden theological option which helps



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<sup>20</sup> K. Dorosz, *Bóg i terror historii*, Warszawa 2010, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> P. Kletowski, P. Marecki, Piotr Szulkin. *Życiopis*, Kraków 2012, p. 58.



reading out deeper layers of the film's message. The crux of the matter there is the notion of a sacrifice, its meaning and significance. What is the sacrifice ritual all about? What function does the sacrifice have? Who is going to be the main sacrifice which has been looked forward for decades?

The reception at the house of heroes. The middle key is waiting for the main guest who is yet to come.

Szulkin's sacrifice is a kind of a scapegoat mechanism described by R. Girard. The main difference is the fact that the sacrifices in Szulkin's film are not innocent, because before the public forces them to commit a great bloody crime, following which they are publicly executed, with the previous ones experiencing a fleeting sense of catharsis. The public does not have a false awareness of the innocence of the people to be sacrificed, which is central to the scapegoat mechanism. Compared to the Girard's idea, in Szulkin's film, punishing a victim has a greater theatrical underpinning (theatralization), there is a built-up ceremony connected with the sacrifice, and most importantly, people are looking forward to it, longing for real emotions: sorrow, regret, compassion. There is also, absent in Girard's concept, a notion of elevation of the victim/sacrifice, who is admired as an individual who can do more, lives to the full, realizing their will free from restraint. This is not someone different, strange, unacceptable, thrown away beyond the public sphere. In Szulkin's vision, there is nothing to suggest that following the sacrifice the public would actually dramatically change their ways. It also remains unknown why the sacrifice is made in the first place, which is a very important issue. The scapegoat mechanism kickstarts following a crime that moves the public.<sup>22</sup> In Szulkin's film, it is the public that has the victim commit the crime.

Therefore, it becomes obvious that the sacrifice that was to be made by Scope is false, having no influence on reality, a transfigured, immoral, where the victim/sacrifice is severely punished for an evil deed to which they have been convinced. Such a sacrifice has only one meaning: it is to become a spectacle, which, for a short while, will "brighten up" the emptiness of spectators' lives, offering them genuine blood and a show. In their own eyes, they will be able to look better for this little while, but a permanent transformation will not happen. They will wait for another show.

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<sup>22</sup> „(...) zbrodnie popełniane na królu, na ojcu, na symbolu najwyższego autorytetu (...) zbrodnie na tle seksualnym, gwałty, kazirodztwa, sodomie”. R. Girard, *Kozioł ofiarny*, trans. M. Goszczyńska, Łódź 1987, p. 18-19.

If the sacrifice made on Australia 458 has always been fake, can the person who is to get impaled in the middle, who is so much looked forward to by the hoping public, become a genuine sacrifice and redeem the "morbid" humankind? Who is it going to be? There is even a plaque with a writ on it for them. This question does not seem to be answered in a satisfactory way. Maybe there is no person who could take this role or they have already been around and will never come back? Maybe this empty pale is a place after a sacrifice that has been rejected and forgotten by humankind? The public still wants it in a way, feeling a kind of metaphysical anxiety, spiritual void, but they are only able to fill it in with a continuing spectacle. This spectacle is an *Ersatz* for the sacrifice.

To sum up it seems worthwhile to get back to Agata Bielik-Robson's concept of crypto-theology to see if Szulkin fits in this version of crypto-theology, which puts emphasis on the fundamental negativity of the human life, offering a diversion into "immanence". Szulkin notices painful lack of adaptation of the human to the world, and does not intend to hide it. Quite on the contrary, he highlights and openly speaks of this difference, since he cannot accept the *status quo*. In this, one can also see a fundamental theological option that Bielik-Robson writes about. Szulkin does not believe, however, in the diversion into the transcendent, for her this way seems to be closed. Yet there is still a possibility of escaping into the immanence, into one's own world, the world of imagination, creativity, elevate isolation, which can prove successful in protecting individuals against the blows of life. This is the only form of individual redemption in Piotr Szulkin's crypto-theology.

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## **Biogram**

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