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Katarzyna Lipińska

"CoinCoin et les Z'inhumains": creative thought of Bruno Dumont

Four years after the television premiere of the mini-series *P'tit Quinquin* (directed by Bruno Dumont, 2014), in September 2018, the French channel ARTE aired the continuation of the adventures of the gendarmes from Pas-de-Calais[1]. Bruno Dumont's new creative work, to which the director gave the title *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains,* was, according to him, the second season, which, like an "echo", referred to the first one (Dumont & Malausa & Tessé, 2018). Bruno Dumont's artistic talent had gained recognition among his colleagues in the cinematographic industry, sealed by the honorary Golden Leopard, awarded to the director during the Locarno Festival in 2018. In the meantime, the series received mixed reviews from French film critics. The grotesque nature of the situations and the characters, which delighted Vincent Malausa and Jean-Philippe Tessé of *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Malausa & Tessé, 2018), was the object of disapproval by *Télé 2 Semaines*[2]. On the positive side, Jacques Mandelbaum, a journalist from *Le Monde,* referred to the director's philosophical past[3], emphasizing the value of *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* as material inviting the spectator to think in terms of a "burlesque science-fiction essay" (Mandelbaum, 2018).

If "burlesque" and "science fiction" are the raw materials used by Bruno Dumont to convey his artistic thought, what other narrative tools does the definition of an essay allow the director to use? According to the analysis of the French researcher Françoise Berdot, the features of the documentary essay are, above all, a free choice of subject matter and an original choice of form (Berdot, 2003). Transferring this definition to Bruno Dumont's creation, his television series takes on an intellectual aspect with the use of "burlesque" and "science fiction" in the form of stylistic games. Such games allow the artist to use "burlesque" and "science fiction", thanks to the originality of the proposed aesthetics, to express the depth of his intellectual content. Following upon the ideas developed by Jacques Mandelbaum and Françoise Berdot, this article is an attempt to define the creative thought of director Bruno Dumont based on the example of his four-part series *CoinCoin et les Z'inhumains*. To this end, we will need to explore the themes and aesthetic means chosen by the director to tell the story of CoinCoin and the gendarmes. "Burlesque" and "science fiction" are examples of

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1 Pas-de-Calais is one of the five departments that make up the Hauts-de-France region.

2 *Télé 2 Weeks* opinion about *Coincoin and the Z'inhumains: http:*//www.programme.tv/c32793315-coincoin-et-les-z-inhumains/noir-ch-est-noir-135766573/ (date of access: 14.11.2018).

3 In the past, Bruno Dumont was a philosophy teacher in high school.

narrative techniques used, among which one may also observe the emphasis placed by Bruno Dumont on the Flanders landscape and the presence of carnival symbols. By his choice of style and subject matter, does the director lead his viewers to reflection?
The analysis of the production context will help to understand the extent of the essayist's freedom of artistic expression via television.

Deviating from tradition

To determine the subject matter of *CoinCoin et les Z'inhumains* and to explore its potential for classification in the category of the essay, let us take a preliminary look at the intrigues and heroes of this series. This will be the first step in defining the genre affiliation of *CoinCoin et les Z'inhumains* and an indication of the direction that has been given to the thought contained in the series.

The hero of the first season, Quinquin, has grown up and has a new name: CoinCoin. The boy avoids mental effort, killing time with pointless driving through local villages and countryside, without a driver's license. In addition, CoinCoin does not obey traffic rules, angering the local gendarmes, who are preoccupied with conducting a new investigation. It soon turns out that Commandant Van der Wyden and Lieutenant Carpentier are actually the main characters of the mini-series, pushing CoinCoin into the background. The gendarmes are trying to find out who or what is responsible for the strange black substance falling from the sky, which, according to their observations, "is black, living, but inhuman". The result of their speculation is the hypothesis of an alien attack on the Earth. Although there is no UFO, the Pas-de-Calais heroes are struggling to solve the mystery of the doubles that are appearing on their territory. Lieutenant Carpentier cannot understand the situation when a clone of Commandant Van der Wyden is sitting next to him in the car while at the same time the original is calling him. This confusing situation leads the Lieutenant to phone Van der Wyden's doppelganger, considering himself the victim of a bad joke. It is worth recalling that in the 1970s a similar situation was faced by the French gendarme Ludovic Cruchot, played by Louis de Funes in the film *Gendarme et les extra-terrestres* (directed by Jean Girault, 1979). The gendarmes at the police station had their doubles, the cause of many comic situations resulting from misunderstandings.

In the two films, both the object of the investigation and the image of the police officers differ from both reality and the tradition of the French criminal series. According to Jacques Baudon, who has distinguished a number of the features of this genre, an important element that gives rhythm and shape to the intrigue is the meticulousness of the method used

by the investigating hero, which guarantees him credibility and a certain charisma (Baudon, 1990). For example, the first episodes of *Les cinq derrières minutes* (1958–1996, various directors) take the form of a social reportage by exploiting Commissioner Bourell's insight about the psychology of the witnesses and their environment (Baudon, 1990). And Commissionner Maigret in *Les enquêtes du commissaire Maigret* (1967–1990, directed by Claude Barma and Jacques Remy) "listens to conversations in suburban bars, collects impressions, feels the atmosphere in order to extract the essence of human passions"[4] and finally to unmask the perpetrator of the crime. Both the attitudes and the methods of action of these police officers are similar to those that exist in reality. The confirmation is the statement of professor Marek Stefański on the website of the Higher School of Security in Gdańsk: "One of the important elements distinguishing an officer is his impeccable moral and ethical attitude and professionalism"[5].

Unlike Bourell and Maigret, we note that the Pas-de-Calais heroes cannot boast of having these qualities. We observe that images of Lieutenant Carpentier and Commandant Van der Wyden definitely differ from the general symbol of a public service officer, and the reference to the gendarme from Saint-Tropez, perhaps unconscious, heralds the burlesque style in which Bruno Dumont writes his series. Critics from *Cahiers du Cinéma* have noted an analogy between the concept of the television series as a series, what is serially produced in the factory – a series of repetitions (Malausa & Tessé, 2018) – and the call for a series of gags, typical in burlesque.

Getting a laugh, the immediate effect, is more important in burlesque, as Emmanuel Dreux suggests, than a moral message or the psychology of the characters, and the structure built on gags outweighs the dramaturgy (Dreux, 2007). In turn, Jean-Philippe Tessé, observing characters interpreted by Chaplin, Buster Keaton or the Marx brothers, came to the conclusion that the aim of burlesque is to create chaos – "disorder, in opposition to order" (Tessé, 2007). One might therefore (dare to) conclude that in Bruno Dumont's series the characters' features contradict the ethical and moral attitude that a gendarme should have. Why not consider that Bruno Dumont's gendarmes are clowns who play with the improbability of their behavior and situations? The commandant's use of the word "clown" when speaking about his own clone can be understood as a clue that he is meant to be the

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4 J. Baudon, *Bon sang, mais c'est bien sûr! Les séries policières de la TV française*, [in:] "Les feuilletons TV européens", G. Hannebelle (ed.), CinémAction, number 57, 1990, 127.

5 Definition of a candidate for the position of a security officer according to Professor Marek Stefański: https://www.wsb.pl/gdansk/studenci/studia-ii-stopnia/sciezka-tradycyjna/kierunki-i-specjalnosci/funkcjonariusz-sluzb-publicznych (date of access: 25.10.2018).

clown in *CoinCoin et les Z'inhumains*. His clown character is indicated by the scene in which Van der Weyden shoots at refugees, arbitrarily suspecting them of being black “magma”: "alive, black, but not from here", "are they extraterrestrials?". His reasoning is illogical, he lacks methodology and the way his sentences are constructed and pronounced makes it difficult, even for the French viewer, to understand what he is saying. In addition, his investigation is more like a neighborhood patrol than a criminal case. Long camera angles, a slow rhythm, non-professional actors, burlesque dialogues and situations, an intrigue constructed on gags – all of this seems to play with the aesthetic codes of television, diametrically different from the tradition of a French police series. In an interview for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, the director confirmed that he hoped that the viewer, in face of this type of philosophical surprise, would enter a "state of strangeness", whose aim is to make him laugh (Dumont & Malausa & Tessé, 2018).

In his philosophical essay *Le rire*, Bergson had already drawn attention to the social function of laughter (Bergson, 1924). Laughter hides "unconscious communication" (Bergson, 1924), "complicity" with others in the same group who laugh at the same object. We observe that television series watched at the same time by a group of viewers can similarly create "complicity" between them via laughter. Indeed, television has the power to create the illusion of community. The shared laughter of people sitting in front of their TVs can explode with considerable force. Laughter can therefore be useful and effective when it spreads throughout society, inviting citizens to think.

Television viewers invited to think

Bruno Dumont's essayistic film attitude is evident from the very beginning of his career. In 1997, after the premiere of *The Life of Jesus*, in an interview for the French publication *Express*, the director accused television of "creating an insensitive generation" (Grassin & Médioni, 1997), but he also proposed a solution. His suggested communicational way to escape television formatting was to create alternative films that would make people think. As Gilles Deleuze suggested, cinema, and we may add the audiovisual arts in general, can take the form of "meditation on Cogito", where an empirical figure cannot exist without the transcendental subject who thought of it or the subject who watches it (Deleuze, 1983). The very act of making a film is subjective and inseparable from the director's intentionality. Bruno Dumont builds his films on the principle of an essay that gives him the opportunity to freely express his own thoughts, but at the same time leaves space for the viewer's activity as the subject who co-creates the meaning. Although Bruno Dumont himself admitted in an

interview with the *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Dumont & Malausa & Tessé, 2018) that the artist has more creative freedom in directing a film for cinema than in working for television (even if he directs for ARTE[6]), he managed to negotiate his own vision in three television works: *P'tit Quinquin* (2014), *Jeannette* (2017) and *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* (2018). The director managed to cope with the television refusal of long shots that are accepted in the cinema, using other means to express his thoughts. Although the scenes are composed of a multitude of cuts to provide the rhythm standard in television, in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*, the motionlessness of the camera is responsible for the overall impression of stagnation.

Other artistic methods adopted by Bruno Dumont are the exaltation of nature and the choice to work with non-professional actors, aspects already notable in the director's earlier works. Absurdity and the grotesque are the means by which, in confusing the viewer, the director leads his audience to pose questions, even those of a metaphysical nature (Dumont & Malausa & Tessé, 2018). One may therefore hypothesize that the mini-series broadcast by ARTE in 2018 is a further promulgation of the thoughts of the essayist-director and his maieutic approach towards television viewers and cinema amateurs via the televised format. Addressing audiovisual essays to television audiences can be understood as a natural development in Bruno Dumont's undertaking to create works that stimulate viewers' autonomy. Jean-Pierre Esquenazi observed that the narrative and stylistic qualities of series could help viewers in the process of identification. This French researcher has observed that to retain the viewer, creators seek to maintain the "connivance of an audience with his series", "a set of gestures addressed explicitly to viewers"[7]. According to this thought, we can affirm that Bruno Dumont seeks to create a communicative complicity with the audience. In an interview with Marie Richeux for *Radio France Culture* on 19th September 2018, the director described his position towards the viewer as follows: "It is necessary to take advantage of the presence of the viewer, who, while being (in front of the TV), should be active, it is superfluous to give him instructions. It is the viewer who is the hero[8]". Bruno Dumont counts on the independence of the interpretation of the television audience, which is ready for more than mere entertainment in their choices for their free time. It is the responsibility of the creator to produce works of art that stimulate the mind and senses. This objective can be

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6 ARTE is a Franco-German public television channel with cultural programs as its editorial line. When it comes to showing feature films, documentaries and series, ARTE buys or co-produces artistic, ambitious and creative works of art.

7 J-P. Esquenazi, *Les séries télévisées. L'avenir du cinéma ?*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2012, 44.

8 B. Dumont, interviewed by Marie Richeux, *Il faut avoir une pensée penchée*, [in:] "Par les temps qui courent", Radio *France Culture*, https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/par-les-temps-qui-courent/bruno-dumont (date of access: 19.09.2018).

achieved thanks to the narrative specificity of the series, which, for Jean-Pierre Esquenazi, communicate with the viewers through the heritage of the popular culture of its carrier (Esquenazi, 2012). *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains,* which was broadcast on two September Thursdays during prime time can be included in such works. At that time, over a million French viewers[9] sat in front of their TV sets in their homes. In this way, they agreed to follow the adventures of the characters of *P'tit Quinquin* in a sensual-intellectual way. When the series deals with social and political issues, public interest is more stimulated, as David Buxton has already noted (Buxton, 2010). *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* discusses sociopolitical themes by playing on the affective, intellectual and aesthetic complicity of the public. This communicative dimension will be analyzed later in this article, mainly through the study of the role of represented landscapes and the use of carnival codes by Bruno Dumont.

The invitation to reflect is evident from the very title, *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*. After translation, it might look like this: "CornerCorner and the inhumans". Quinquin – human has turned into a CoinCoin or CornerCorner if we translate it into English. The character's perspicacity and sense of observation are limited, as if enclosed in the "Corner" of a triangle. It would be wrong, however, to accuse Bruno Dumont of making a mockery of his hero in giving him the name mentioned above. This rather indicates that he is the archetype of Bergson's disconnected dreamer/comedian, possessed of a mechanical rigidity, unable to react in a flexible and attentive way (Bergson, 1924). It is this posture, which arouses laughter, which aims, by holding a tension, to "remove symptoms of stiffness from the social body". "This rigidity," as Bergson says, "is comedy, and laughter is its punishment" (Bergson, 1924). Thus, the title's combination of the name of CoinCoin (CornerCorner), who represents the human species, with non-humans, may suggest the presence of phenomena and beings, whose comprehension by the human mind can only encounter obstacles, when the human mind loses its consciousness. The word "inhuman", understood as the opposite of the noun "human", is a term for animals, supernatural forces and machines. It is worth noting that machines and their sounds are omnipresent in the series, which accentuates the presence of mechanical rigidity in all bodies. Finally, the title points to the existence of two heroes: the individual, namely CoinCoin, who represents humanity, and the collective, which is inhuman. It is worth recalling that the series is constructed around the gendarmes (omitted from the title). Like

[9] *Un million de fans pour CoinCoin,* "Nord Littoral", 24/09/2018 : http://www.nordlittoral.fr/103453/article/2018-09-24/un-million-de-fans-pour-coincoin (date of access: 25.09.2018).

CoinCoin and the other characters in the series, the gendarmes are also victims of the automatisms that push them toward absurd actions and behaviors.

The above-mentioned mechanical rigidity which also finds its expression in the title, its graphic form and its *sonority*, invites us to reflect. Hearing the name CoinCoin pronounced in French, a viewer familiar with *P'tit Quinquin* will almost automatically recall the character from 2014. This sonic resemblance may suggest a natural evolution of the boy who was Quinquin into the teenager CoinCoin. The critics from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Vincent Malausa and Jean-Philippe Tessé, who welcomed the series with great enthusiasm, have no doubt about it. Quinquin and CoinCoin evoke the same hero, reflecting each other's "echo" and "asymmetry" (Malausa & Tessé, 2018). In this sense, CoinCoin is a deformed copy of his original (Malausa & Tessé, 2018).

It is also interesting to note the original, graphic expression of "z'inhumains", which creates a mark that does not exist in the standard written, officially accepted French language. The choice to combine the letter "z" with "inhumains" suggests that the action takes place in the department of Pas-de-Calais, recreating the characteristic way the inhabitants of this area accentuate these words. Applying this rule, the title *P'tit Quinquin* could take the form of *Lil Quinquin* in English or *M'ły Quinquin* in Polish. "Petit" in French means small. The protagonists of Bruno Dumont's films, inhabitants of the area of the Strait of Dover (Pas-de-Calais) in French Flanders, drop the pronunciation of the "e" sound in the word "petit", which gives a spoken version of "p'tit". Analogically, we can imagine that in English they might pronounce "lil" instead of "little" or, speaking Polish, they would "swallow" the "a" in the word "mały ", saying "m'ły".

So as not to occlude the oral specificity which gives a characteristic melody to the French words spoken by the protagonists of *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*, and to retain their geographical and cultural identity, we have opted for the original title and character names in the next part of our article.

Flanders Landscapes

The style of expression used by the protagonists in Bruno Dumont's series is not the only feature that reveals their geographical affiliation. Etymologically, the name Quinquin derives from the Flemish word "quinquin" (Vermesse, 1861) meaning "boy". *P'tit Quinquin* is the protagonist of a 19th century song heard in one of Lille's cabarets. Thus, to those in the know, the title of the mini-series *P'tit Quinquin* already suggests the setting. Like its predecessor, the title *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* indicates its connection with the culture of

northern France, as mentioned above. However, the most visible proof of the series' inscription in the French Flanders landscape is its scenery. *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* does not include a single indoor scene, and the action takes place mostly against the backdrop of nature. We may even get the impression that the main character is nature. In the same way, Janusz Gazda noted that a similar role was given to Mazury in *Knife in Water* (*Noż w wodzie,* Roman Polański, 1962): "For Polański, the environment, landscape, the environment in which his film characters move is never an insignificant *background*, it is always a matter, the basic material, next to man, from which a film is made"[10]. Would it be too daring to wonder if, for Bruno Dumont, nature is an extension of the "interior" of the human characters?

To respond to this question, we need to examine the director's intention in choosing the scenery of Flanders in the context of the system of co-financing of films by the French regions. It is worth noting that a discussion of the choice of outdoor location for economic rather than artistic reasons, i.e. the dependence of the film on financial considerations, could destabilize our portrayal of an essayist-philosopher, i.e. Bruno Dumont whose free thought is motor. What mainly motivates the French regions to subsidize films is the promotion of their territory and their culture through image. It is worth noting that the dissertation about the choice of scenery for economic, not artistic reasons, the dependence of the form of the film on the financial argument, might upset our hypothesis about the free-thinking attitude of Bruno Dumont. Briefly, to receive such a subsidy, the film must be shot to a large extent in the region of the sponsor, be inscribed in its culture and landscape and emphasize its tourist attractiveness. The co-producer of *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* is Pictanovo, the organisation that manages the Hauts-de-France film fund, where part of French Flanders is located. In 2014, Pictanovo also supported the first season of the *P'tit Quinquin* mini-series with a grant of €150,000[11].

However, financial considerations had little influence on Bruno Dumont's choice of scene location. Dumont set all his films, except for *Twentynine Palms* (2003) and *Camille Claudel 1915* (2013), in his native Flanders. The choice of this landscape is connected to the artist's natural attachments. Bailleul, the Flemish town near Dunkirk, is the director's birthplace and childhood home. It served as an open-air workshop for the *Life of Jesus* (*La vie de Jesus*, 1997), Dumont's first feature film. The landscapes of Flanders are ubiquitous in the works of the French director because they are part of the natural world to which he belongs.

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[10] J. Gazda, *Poczucie obcości i chęć wtopienia się w inność. Podróże filmowe Romana Polańskiego,* in : Kwartalnik Filmowy,1993, number 4, 141.

[11] Information available on the Pictanovo website: http://www.pictanovo.com/oeuvres/p-tit-quinquin/, (date of access: 13.11.2018).

For Dumont, this geographical area is like Heidegger's Umwelt, naturally present in his films because it helps him express his emotions, artistic visions and thoughts.

According to the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, literature, music, image are able to capture the sensitivity of the invisible world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964), in which the body and mind of the creator are inscribed. Cinema, as art, can also communicate phenomena invisible to the human eye by means of a variety of artistic resources at its disposal. The art of Bruno Dumont is an example of this ability to capture the world of the senses. The director, through his films and series, reflects the sensitivity of Flanders, which is dear to him. He has observed these landscapes since childhood. Because his body and mind are connected to this place, the artist feels Flanders as the land of his origins. This relationship between the director and his natural environment is obvious in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains.* Thus, we can observe the spontaneity with which the artist places the temperament and the bodies of his heroes in the natural open air of the Côte d'Opale and the surroundings of Boulogne-Sur-Mer. This is the ambient world, the natural environment and the place where life unfolds. This attachment allows the director to raise more general issues. In an interview with Aurélie Charon for *Radio France Culture*, Bruno Dumont confirms that the landscapes of Flanders and the characters inscribed there are for him a means of describing human nature, the "inner four seasons of the year"[12] that every human being possesses inside him/herself. It should be noted that it is not the director's intention to illustrate the life of the inhabitants of northern France (Dumont & Charon, 2018). Bruno Dumont's landscapes, despite their omnipresence in the mini-series, do not aim to copy reality. Images are "not", as Vincent Amiel wrote "mirrors", they "shape our grip"[13] of reality. The use of landscapes in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* serves as a metaphor for the sensitivity of the protagonists to help us, the viewers, to "grasp" the atmosphere, to understand the world presented. The sea, tanning beaches and dunes express emotions, internal states that are difficult to explain, and even more difficult to describe. To express these emotions, Bruno Dumont creates a subjective film language and brings chaos into the harmonious landscape of Flanders. By borrowing the method and themes of Flemish painters such as Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, who introduced chaos into landscapes by filling them with fantastical characters and situations, the director believes that disorder conveys more about human nature than order. Chaos, a characteristic of the burlesque, is something that, unlike the norm, disturbs us, makes us wonder and ask

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[12] B. Dumont, interviewed by Aurélie Charon, *Les z'inhumains de Bruno Dumont*, [in:] "Une vie d'artiste", Radio *France Culture*, 29.09.2018.

[13] V. Amiel, *Le corps au cinéma*, PUF, Paris 1998, 6.

questions. One such aesthetic trick of the director is to include the science-fiction phenomenon of a black, bubbling magma falling from the sky, in a natural, harmonious landscape. The black ooze disrupts the landscape in which the beautiful lighthouse in Boulogne-Sur-Mer stands facing the sea, symbolizing rescue for lost sailors. Commander Roger Van der Weyden describes this unnatural state of affairs as a 'brothel', 'disorder' or even an 'apocalypse'. For him, this is a case of an attack of unidentified objects sent by an extraterrestrial civilization. According to the hero, the above-mentioned attack heralds "the end of life, the death of everything, even the gendarmerie!"

The landscape of French Flanders, in the Dumont series and in reality, also includes refugees. They stroll along urban roads, waiting to gain access to the UK. Almost every journalist asks Bruno Dumont about his intentions, about his message concerning the issue of refugees in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*. The director systematically responds that they are now part of the landscape of the Pas-de-Calais region. By including their image, the director describes the reality of the landscape of today's Flanders. Refugees settle at camping sites, we can meet them walking along the roads, spending time on the beaches, strolling through the surrounding meadows or dunes. According to the director, they appear in the series as the figure of the "stranger" and he describes the attitude of some inhabitants of the North towards them. The director denies sticking his political “gęba"[14] in, claiming that in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*, as in reality, refugees simply are; nobody is interested in them; nobody bothers them; they are part of the landscape that his series reproduces.

CoinCoin et les z'inhumains warns once and for all against the scapegoat mechanism, whose importance for the group in a crisis situation is described by Réné Girard (Girard, 1982). In a scene where a black magma falls from the sky on the commandant's head, he accuses the refugees of being behind it. He starts shooting at them, running after them, terrorizing them. From an entity that lives in harmony with its environment, they become, in the blink of an eye, responsible for disorder in a crisis. Before the police officers discover the existence of the black substance, a group of Africans passes by on a nearby road. The commandant looks at the refugees when the car he is in passes them by. This is the most banal of scenes, a vehicle drives alongside characters walking on the road. Yet this inscription in the scenery takes on a different meaning after the local gendarmes discover the black substance. Instead of corpses, the object of their investigation is this magma, which shows signs of life. The gendarmes nervously demand that a group of refugees, passing near the "crime" scene,

[14] The phenomenon of "culcultising" the children, analyzed with irony by Witold Gombrowicz in "Ferdydurke", can be moved to the foreigner "culcultised" by the natives.

identify themselves. The situation is ironic, because in shouting "papiere!" the officers require identification from people unable to prove their identity. This impossibility of presenting the requested documents confuses the commandant, who notes an analogy between the skin color of the African foreigners and the black color of the magma, commenting under his breath: "black hole", "black, alive and not from here". After a while, he asks the scientific expert: "Are they aliens?" and the specialist responds: "These are men, my commandant".

In this scene, the empty yellow meadows and the crossroads where the gendarmes stop the refugees emphasize the "helplessness" of the camera. This aesthetic language, the impression of the cessation of life, may signify a lack of judgment on the part of the director, his aversion to the moral verdict of the police and to all Manichaeism. According to Bruno Dumont, the commandant is neither good nor bad: "He's a real man."[15] "The commandant is in each of us." It can be deduced, following the logic of Bruno Dumont, that the commandant Van der Weyden is one interior landscape of human nature.

General confusion

Bruno Dumont's TV essay presents the attitude of the gendarmes towards the refugees as a fear of the unknown. The Commander and his assistant are hostile towards "those who are not from here", provoking a reaction from the viewer. Aude Dassonville, a *Telerama* journalist, notes that the series leaves "a strange impression: the kind we feel when we listen to the embarrassing words of people we thought we loved"[16]. It can be assumed that the intended effect of the burlesque is achieved: to confuse, to throw on the viewer a cream pie, to turn his/her system of values upside down. The gendarmes are deliberately comical, even grotesque, and their attitude to refugees illustrates in an exaggerated way the position of the extreme French right towards migrants. In one of the scenes, Roger Van der Weyden and Carpentier do not want to shake hands with a Muslim imam, so they turn away. In retaliation, the imam slaps Lieutenant Carpentier's head. The entire *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* series is built on similar gags that, according to the burlesque theory of Emmanuel Dreux, are intended to set the tone for the narrative (Dreux, 2007).

Instead of presenting reality in the style of his new-wave colleagues, Dumont creates film-like curved mirrors that deform it. In Dumont's series, the characters are misshapen and

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15 B. Dumont, interviewed by Vincent Malausa & Jean-Philippe Tessé, *Splitch! Splatch!*, [in:] "Cahiers du cinéma", number 747, September 2018, 16.

16 A. Dassonville, *Regardez les deux premeirs épisodes de „CoinCoin et les z'inhumains", la suite de P'tit Quinquin*, [in:] "Télérama", 17 september 2018, https://www.telerama.fr/series-tv/regardez-les-deux-premiers-episodes-de-coincoin-et-les-zinhumains,-la-suite-de-ptit-quinquin,n5809528.php (consultation : 28.10.2018).

take the form of surrealist figures, as if extracted from the paintings of Francis Bacon. Gilles Deleuze noted that the distortion of the face or body in Bacon's paintings is characterized by a static state, "subordinating the movement to force"[17]. We can observe a similar process in *CoinCoin and z'inhumains*. The faces of Commandant Van der Weyden and Lieutenant Carpentier are tired and their dentition is incomplete. They also express, in a natural way, the forces that act on their bodies from the inside, the symptoms of their emotions. The commandant's fear of the unknown manifests itself when his mouth becomes like a balloon, producing a multitude of noises. The deformation is also visible in the linguistic sphere. The speech of our heroes is unclear, stretched out like the spilling creations of Bacon. Bruno Dumont himself compares the commandant to a cubist figure during the interview with Sonia Devillers for France Inter: "The commandant is a square, he lacks rounding"[18]. In order to get his own emotions and personality out of the commandant, the director used absurd. He whispered illogical speeches about order and disorder into the ear of the actor who played Van Der Weyden (Dumont & Devillers, 2018). The lack of logic in these speeches encouraged the actor who played Carpentier to review the information he heard. For example, viewers see Carpentier's confusion when Van Der Weyden announces that "the disorder surprises him." The Lieutenant, like Voltaire's naive Candide, asks: "My Commandant, could it be otherwise? - What is surprising is order!". The Commandant compares order to the gendarmerie, which is a law enforcement agency, so "what's surprising is disorder! The whole mess!". This dialogue gives us, the viewers, a clue to identity of the perpetrator of the "crime". Disorder, according to Jean-Philipp Tessé, is a characteristic feature of burlesque, which "is a trouble, a disorder, an opposition to order" (Tessé, 2007). So the guilty party in this artistic chaos is the burlesque!

Confusion is visible even in the extreme right-wing "Block", where one of the leaders is deformed. He is depicted as a teenage boy who speaks in deep baritone. He gives very serious instructions to CoinCoin and his friend, Le Gros (Fatty), to raid the refugee camp, where they arrive as if to colonize the place. However, they cannot break anything. Bruno Dumont compares the teenagers to imbeciles, who throw words into the wind and have no clear idea of the policy agenda they are serving (Dumont & Charon, 2018). They put up propaganda posters for the "Block" more out of boredom than out of party vocation. Their meeting with an African girl is proof of their political guilelessness. Her human presence

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17 G. Deleuze, *Françis Bacon. Logique de la sensation*, Editions de la différence, Paris 1994, 40.

18 B. Dumont, interviewed by Sonia Devillers, *"Bruno Dumont : P'tit Quinquin fait Coincoin"*, [in:] "L'Instant M", Radio *France Inter*, 20 september 2018.

evokes from them simple sympathy, as if she were their kid sister. Tichner might say that this dialogical relationship established between them has annihilated "evil" (Tichner, 2006). The girl's face, devoid of any mask, the authenticity of her look, reminds the boys of their ethical responsibilities and the duty of respect to others, as stipulated in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas, 1995). We can perceive the presence of this philosophy in Dumont's series when the director summarizes that people are equal. However, he remains skeptical of the idea that man is by nature a social being: "we are all animals, all living beings[19]".

Comedy and laughter, omnipresent in *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*, direct our attention to the order that has been disturbed. Bergson's idea of mechanical rigidity is transferred to the bodies and minds of the characters. CoinCoin confesses with much artificiality his eternal love for his ex-girlfriend Eve. He declares that he will always love her, even if she prefers women now, "or something else" and even meets one of his replacements. CoinCoin takes on the attitude of the unhappy lover who, out of despair, has no choice but to "make love with someone else". The tone of this scene veers momentarily to that of a soap opera. CoinCoin's inner state is reminiscent of Buster Keaton in love; he will do anything for his lady love, even run faster than speed. This nod to the burlesque, the construction of the series on gags are used to confuse and disorient. In one scene, Dany, CoinCoin's uncle, walks in circles in the backyard in front of the barn. At one point, the wall of the barn falls on Dany, who comes out of the situation unscathed, because he happens to be standing directly in front of the opening of the door. The reference is a gag from *One Week* (directed by Edward F. Cline, Buster Keaton, 1920) with Buster Keaton. The structure of the house collapses around him, unaware of what is happening until the end because he is auspiciously placed where he will not be injured by the destruction happening around him.

Another indicator of artificiality in the Bruno Dumont mini-series is the figure of the clone, which symbolizes for him a reflection of ourselves that we had not expected. When the Commandant meets his double and sees himself in mirror, he does not know how to react other than to surround the house where the clones gather. At this point, laughter, which according to Daniel Grojnowski requires another human being, loses its meaning. Its social function is disrupted when we divide in two to become our own interlocutor (Grojnowski, 2014). Evidence of this is Commandant Van der Weyden's inability to communicate with his clone. The hero cannot explain the reproduction of doubles or the falling black substance in

[19] B. Dumont, interviewed by Aurélie Charon, *Les z'inhumains de Bruno Dumont*, [in:] "Une vie d'artiste", Radio *France Culture*, 29/09/2018.

any other way than as signs of the end of the world: "it's the Apocalyssspssse." A deformed word coming out of the mouth of a police officer evokes laughter. This situation, however, draws attention to the new paradigm of catastrophe that our society is currently facing. Philosopher Michael Foessel explains the rise of "contemporary apocalyptic fears"[20] by the loss of faith in the value of the world, and the belief that it is going to self-destruct. The nuclear threat, health or environmental crises, are all examples of disasters that have led to apocalyptic fears and a new paradigm, based on a fear that wrongly interprets "as a disaster the distress that cries out for new inventions"[21]. Symptoms of the Apocalypse in the series include: the black substance falling from the sky, the presence of doubles and the zombification of characters.

Bruno Dumont proposes a cure for this apocalyptic distress. The carnival turns out to be a panacea, thanks to which everyone can express his or her disagreement with the laws of the new paradigm. Mikhail Bakhtine highlights the transgressive function of the carnival in his essay devoted to the analysis of the work of François Rabelais who transforms a formidable hell into a fun show that can be shown in a public place (Bakhtine, 1970). The carnival takes on a similar role in the series *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains*, as a place of shared play, singing and clapping of hands. The carnival created by Bruno Dumont can be compared to the process that Deleuze and Guattari called "rhizome" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1976). Humanity comes together in a great unity that overcomes apocalyptic fear. The carnival is a place where the relations of horizontally structured power do not exist. A Union that intertwines otherness and multiplicity becomes a symbol of the new order. Together, in solidarity, the group gains strength thanks to its diverse composition: people of different nationalities, animals, zombies and doubles…

The end ... of the world

To conclude this article, it is worth mentioning the definition of burlesque formulated by Petr Kral, for whom burlesque is, among other things, the introduction to general chaos, "thus reinforcing the concrete and erasing it at the same time"[22]. The author emphasizes its moral dimension as well. Our discussion has shown that Bruno Dumont uses burlesque in his series as a tool to describe certain existing phenomena without taking a dominant position on them. Moving away from delivering moral messages, the use of burlesque language is

[20] M. Foessel, *Après la fin du monde*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 2012, 14.
[21] Idem, 286.
[22] P. Kral, *Le Burlesque ou Morale de la tarte à la crème*, Editions Stock, Paris 1984, 189.

supposed to create chaos that leads to laughter. It is the laughter and fantastic motifs contained in Bruno Dumont's work that implement the sense of meaning, that in turn allow us to take a step back from the surrounding world. Laughter can direct viewers' attention to certain existing social problems, without judging, by simply pointing out their existence.

Our questioning about the philosophical scope of *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* leads us, in conclusion, to compare the reflexive approach chosen by the director to awaken the spectator to the act of throwing a cream pie. With the help of irony, laughter and burlesque, which are the ingredients of this pie, the viewer's senses sober up and push him or her to raise his or her head to look up. Thinking about the hit of the ironic pie, the viewer is forced to focus on the cause of the laughter. It can therefore be said that the television essay offered to the viewer creates space for expressing one's own thoughts, posits the viewer as a subject who co-creates meaning. We have also observed that the motif of the end of the world, present in the series, draws attention to a new paradigm, which is embodied by the catastrophe or the Apocalypse, the fear of contemporary human reason. *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* is therefore a television essay that can be qualified as philosophical, in that it raises existential issues and moves us to think, criticizing our attitudes towards each other.

Finally, our analysis revealed the communicative dimension of *CoinCoin et les z'inhumains* through the study of its narrative and aesthetics tools. Among many themes, the series presents the science that seems powerless against chaos. Our reflection is open to other research on the representation of science in television series. One of the very current scientific topics that could be questioned by the series in the context of education seems the artificial intelligence. Many series feature this theme: *Westworld* (2016), *Real Humans* (2012) and *Black Mirror* (2011). The series seems to be a relevant way for introduces, through the worlds its represent, to the issues of the progress of science, humanity and transhumanism in the context of education.

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“CoinCoin et les Z’inhumains”: Creative thought of Bruno Dumont

Abstract
Our article aims to analyze the essayistic and philosophical posture of Bruno Dumont, through the study of his latest series in four episodes, *CoinCoin and Z'inhumains*, broadcast in September 2018 by the French channel ARTE. Our questioning about the philosophical scope of *CoinCoin et les z’inhumains* leaded us to compare the reflexive approach chosen by the director to awaken the spectator to the act of throwing a cream pie. With the help of irony, laughter, carnival characters and burlesque, which are the ingredients of this pie, the viewer's senses sober up and push him or her to raise his or her head to look up.

Keywords: burlesque, televised carnival, audiovisual essay, Bruno Dumont, *CoinCoin and les Z'inhumains*

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